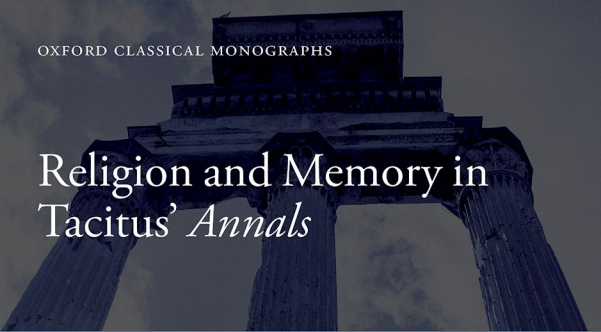




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Religion and Memory in Tacitus' *Annals*

Kelly E. Shannon-Henderson



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Religion and Memory in Tacitus' *Annals*

KELLY E. SHANNON-HENDERSON

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K. E. Shannon

April 2018
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations to standard authors and texts are usually taken from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (rev. 3rd edn.).

AC	<i>L'Antiquité classique</i>
AION	<i>Annali dell'Istituto universitario orientale di Napoli</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BAGRW	<i>Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World</i>
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BJ	<i>Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landesmuseums in Bonn und des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande</i>
C&M	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1863–)
CISA	<i>Contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica dell'Università del Sacro Cuore</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
Cl. Ant.	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
G&R	<i>Greece and Rome</i> , NS (1954/5–)
IA	<i>Iranica antiqua</i>
ILS	H. Dessau, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> (1892–1916)
IRT	<i>Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania</i> , by J. M. Reynolds and J. B. Ward-Perkins, enhanced electronic reissue by Gabriel Bodard and Charlotte Roueché (2009), http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/
Inscr. Ital.	<i>Inscriptiones Italiae</i> (1931/2–)
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LCM	<i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i>
MD	<i>Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici</i>
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
REL	<i>Revue des études latines</i>
RSC	<i>Rivista di studi classici</i>
SCPP	<i>Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum</i> (1923–)

<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>ThesCRA</i>	<i>Thesaurus Cultuum et Rituum Antiquorum</i> (2004–14)
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> (1900–)
<i>YCIS</i>	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Introduction

Religion, Memory, and Tacitus

Roman writers seem to have practically always had the fear that various aspects of their culture were in decline.¹ M. Terentius Varro, author of the multivolume *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum* on Roman gods and cult,² believed that Rome's traditional relationship with its gods was in serious trouble and in need of intervention, according to Augustine:

deos eosdem ita coluerit colendosque censuerit ut in eo ipso opere litterarum suarum dicat se timere ne pereant, non incursu hostili, sed civium neglegentia, de qua illos velut ruina liberari a se dicit et in memoria bonorum per eius modi libros recondi atque servari utiliore cura quam Metellus de incendio sacra Vestalia et Aeneas de Troiano excidio penates liberasse praedicatur.

(Augustine *De civ. D* 6.2 = Varro *ARD* fr. 2)

(He worshipped these same gods and thought they ought to be worshipped, to such an extent that he says in this very work that he fears they might perish not because of an enemy invasion, but due to the negligence of his fellow citizens; but he says that the gods would be freed by him from this negligence as if from destruction, and that through books of this sort they could be stored in the memory of good men and preserved with a concern more useful than that with which Metellus is said to have rescued Vesta's sacred objects from fire and Aeneas to have liberated the Penates from the destruction of Troy.³)

In Varro's view, it was as necessary for these religious traditions to be committed to writing as it was for the Trojan Penates or the Palladium to be snatched from burning buildings.⁴ His emphasis on memory is striking: *memoria* is conceived of almost as a physical place, a storehouse, where

¹ For examples in Roman literature, see Crawley 1971.

² On Varro's work, Rawson 1985, 312–16 is still useful; see recently van Nuffelen 2010; North 2014; Kronenberg 2017.

³ All translations from Latin texts are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁴ On the passage, see Rawson 1985, 313–14, and more recently MacRae 2016, 53–4; Kronenberg 2017, 316–19 (for a different interpretation).

Roman religious traditions can be placed for safekeeping in a world made dangerous not by war, but by an equally threatening *negligentia*. Varro's sense of the religious crisis he believes afflicts Rome is palpable, but it is not unique to him. Elizabeth Rawson has noted that one factor motivating investigations of Roman cult practice in late Republican "antiquarian" literature was a "desire to record and understand (usually in order to preserve or revive) traditions" that were thought to be in the process of being forgotten.⁵

This idea did not go away. In the *Annals*, written some 150 years after Varro's *Antiquitates*, Tacitus also discusses details of traditional religious practice, typically from the point of view of alteration or decline. He reports challenges to, or the loss of, traditional rules, rites, and buildings, focusing on the interlocking roles of emperor, Senate, and people. Tacitus never explicitly states why he includes this material, and indeed may not have seen it as a defined category whose inclusion required justification. Yet certain passages seem to indicate a desire to maintain memories of religious sites or rituals when they are threatened. Whereas Varro deplored citizens' negligence as the cause of the threat, for Tacitus it seems rather the entire Imperial system that puts Roman religion at risk.

0.1 RELIGION AND MEMORY

This emphasis on tradition and decline lends itself well to analysis through theories about what scholars refer to as cultural memory or collective memory:⁶ the idea that the way individuals remember the past is determined by the social frameworks within which they live, and that a society's past is not an abstract or objective concept, but is always actively constructed by its members in the present. From the beginning of cultural memory as a discipline, scholars have recognized religion's role in cementing a society's identity and providing continuity with its past. Maurice Halbwachs, the father of cultural memory studies, already used the concept of "religious memory" in his *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), to describe how a religious community uses stories about its own past, and rituals that commemorate it, in order to define itself as a community in the present.⁷ Halbwachs was

⁵ Rawson 1985, 300, and ch. 20 *passim*.

⁶ For an introduction to the field, see Olick and Robbins 1998; for memory/cultural memory theory and Roman culture, see esp. Walter 2004; Gowing 2005; Galinsky 2014; Galinsky and Lapatin 2015; Galinsky 2016.

⁷ See Halbwachs 1992, ch. 6, "Religious Collective Memory" (originally titled "La Mémoire collective des groupes religieux"). Halbwachs 1992 contains English versions of *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925) and of part of *La Topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte: Étude de mémoire collective* (1941). For a lucid summary of Halbwachs's ideas on religious memory, see Stroumsa 2016, 333–4.

speaking of early Christians who sought to use the memory of the life of Christ, kept alive via repeated re-enactment in rituals such as the Eucharist and by the liturgical calendar of the Christian year that followed the outlines of Christ's life (birth, death, resurrection), to set themselves apart from the contemporary pagan society in which they lived.⁸ For other theorists of cultural memory, a set of religious beliefs and practices that is shared by an entire society (rather than simply a subgroup within a society, as was the case with the early Christians) plays an important role in linking an entire civilization to its past. Pierre Nora, in his essay introducing the classic three-volume study of what he calls "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) in French culture, identified the Church as a component of French cultural memory that is fragmenting and slipping away in the modern era.⁹ On this interpretation, a decline in church attendance means that the traditional Roman Catholic faith no longer plays its role in defining cultural memory, in actively linking the French people to their own past.

To be sure, we should be cautious in using Halbwachs's and Nora's visions of how Christianity helps construct identity to help us understand Roman religion, given the many fundamental differences between ancient paganism and contemporary Roman Catholicism (or even ancient Christianity), and between the ancient Roman Empire and a modern nation-state. Indeed, the concept of "a religion" as an identity group distinct from other religions had not yet developed by Tacitus' time.¹⁰ But the concept of religious memory can still be useful for understanding polytheistic ancient pagan societies. Jan Assmann has applied it to ancient Egypt,¹¹ and recent studies have sought to do the same for Greek and Roman religion.¹² It should come as no surprise that a society as invested in (not to say obsessed with) tradition as ancient Rome is particularly well suited to being analyzed from the perspective of cultural memory, and its religious system is no exception.

The fact that Roman paganism places a high value on ritual is a commonplace in studies of Roman religion, and this ritual conservatism could be considered the linchpin of Roman religious memory. Many theorists have identified ritual as a key component of collective or cultural memory, in that a community's regular repetition of the same ritual is a powerful way of commemorating an

⁸ Halbwachs 1992, 93–9.

⁹ Nora 1992, 2, 9. The work of sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger on secularization in modern France, which she describes as "a crisis of collective memory" (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 130), is also influenced by Nora's ideas (e.g. Hervieu-Léger 2000, 127–8).

¹⁰ See e.g. Beard et al. 1998, i.42–3; Rüpke 2007, 5–6; Nongbri 2013 (esp. 26–38, 46–64); Morgan 2015, 264–5. Beard 1986, 46 argues that "religion" as a concept first emerged in Rome with Cicero's *De Divinatione*, but this is still a fundamentally different use of the concept from, for example, describing Christianity or Islam as "religions."

¹¹ See J. Assmann 2006, ch. 7; 2011, esp. chs. 4, 6, and 7.

¹² See e.g. Dignas and Smith 2012; Rüpke 2012a; contributions in Galinsky and Lapatin 2015 and Galinsky 2016, esp. Rüpke 2016.

event or person from its past (often the very distant past) and perpetuating that memory over decades or even centuries.¹³ The Christian communities discussed by Halbwachs and Nora made extensive use of biblical texts, whose stories when continually revisited in worship and study connected believers to their past. In contrast, as Guy Stroumsa has recently argued, Roman religion had no revealed scriptures, and there were relatively few who could have read such books even if they had existed, since Rome was only a “semi-literate” society; instead, regularly repeated rituals were essential in tying Romans to their cultic past.¹⁴ Many of the major festivals of the Roman cultic calendar, the important priesthoods of the state cult, and the rites they performed, were thought to have very ancient origins. Many were ascribed to Numa; some festivals, such as the Lupercalia, explicitly preserved memories of the time of Rome’s foundation (or even earlier).¹⁵ By repeatedly observing these festivals and maintaining these priest-hoods, participants in Roman ritual were in a very real way keeping alive the memory of the city’s most ancient past, which played a fundamental part in their collective identity. Whenever the spectators at their twice-yearly festivals watched a Salian priest dancing in procession through Rome and heard him reciting the *Carmen Saliare*, preserved in a Latin so ancient as to be unintelligible at least by the first century BC;¹⁶ or every year on 1 March when the Vestal Virgins extinguished and rekindled the goddess’s sacred flame that had been carefully tended from the time Numa inaugurated her worship,¹⁷ participants were using ritual to enact and embody a connection with the city’s past, both the distant Regal Period in which these rituals allegedly had their origin, and the entire stretch of time since then, which (to borrow Hervieu-Léger’s image)

¹³ e.g. Connerton 1989, 45: “All rites are repetitive, and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past”; A. Assmann 2008, 100, identifying religion as an area of active cultural memory; J. Assmann 2011, 42: “Through regular repetition, festivals and rituals ensure the communication and continuance of the knowledge that gives the group its identity.” See also Nora 1992, 6–7 and *passim*; Rüpke 2012a, 139–40 on “ritual memory” (*rituelle Erinnerung*). Rappaport 1999, 36–7 identifies “invariance (more or less)” as an essential feature of his definition of religion, and also (32–3) notes that even “new” rituals are usually formed from elements of previously existing rituals, and that attempts to introduce truly new rituals are rarely successful.

¹⁴ Stroumsa 2016, 335–7. Cf. J. Assmann 2011, 42: “In illiterate societies there is no other way [but ritual] to participate in the cultural memory;” see also 70–6, 123–4. For a recent discussion of the interplay between text and religious practice in Rome, see MacRae 2016.

¹⁵ For the attribution of Rome’s festival calendar and major priesthoods to Numa, see Livy 1.19–20. For the Lupercalia, thought to have been celebrated by Romulus and Remus, see Livy 1.5; Ovid *Fast.* 2.259–80, 381–421.

¹⁶ On the rituals for Mars performed by the Salii, see Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.70.1–5; Gordon 1990, 188–9; Rüpke 1990, 24–5; Beard et al. 1998, i.43. For the unintelligibility of the *Carmen Saliare* in Tacitus’ day, see Quint. *Inst.* 2.6.40; see recently MacRae 2016, 48–50 for written commentaries on the hymn. See further §3.2, pp. 123–4.

¹⁷ See recently DiLuzio 2016, 200–1; for Numa as the founder of the worship of Vesta, see Ovid *Fast.* 6.249ff.

we can conceptualize as an unbroken chain of pious Romans carefully preserving and repeating those rituals down the centuries.

All the examples I have just mentioned are drawn from the Roman state cult and involve actors, locations, and offerings chosen, maintained, and financed at state expense. The close entanglement of Rome's ritual life with its politics, wars, governmental institutions, and so forth is also a commonplace in the study of ancient, and particularly Roman, religion,¹⁸ and raises the question of how far it is possible to separate "religion" from other aspects of Roman society. In a world where priesthoods were filled from the same pool of elite families that provided candidates for the magistracies¹⁹ and where every sitting of the Roman Senate or battle fought by the Roman army was accompanied by sacrifice,²⁰ it is reasonable to ask whether religion was not so embedded in the societal fabric that we cannot really think of it as a separable category of Roman life at all.²¹ This has important implications for the present study of religion and memory in Tacitus. Is "religious memory" any different from "cultural memory" or "collective memory?" What makes a form of memory distinctively "religious?" Or, put another way, does thinking about memory from a "religious" angle add anything to our understanding of Roman culture, and of Tacitus, that we cannot get from merely thinking about "cultural memory?"

Where religious memory becomes a particular form of memory, and where I believe it can particularly help us understand Tacitus' *Annals*, is in considering what were the particular perceived consequences of the repeated performance of ancestral rituals. For Roman rituals were not simply intended as arenas for the upper classes to advertise their piety, success, or wealth, nor were they merely traditions that brought the distant past to life (although they performed those functions too); Roman cult practice was also a vehicle for maintaining a relationship with the gods. While that relationship was, as countless scholars of Roman religion have rightly pointed out, inextricably bound up with other elements of society (government, magistrates, aristocratic competition), the fact that it involves the gods makes it a peculiar element of

¹⁸ e.g. Liebeschuetz 1979, 1; Beard et al. 1998, 43; Rüpke 2007, 9–10. This fact has also not been lost on non-classicists in cultural memory studies: cf. Halbwachs 1992, 100–1 n. 22 on Athenian state religion: "Nothing separates the state from religion, the civil principle from the religious principle."

¹⁹ In some cases, these priests performed functions that we moderns might identify as "secular" rather than "religious:" see Scheid 1984 and Beard et al. 1998, i.25–6 on the roles of the *pontifices*.

²⁰ See Rüpke 2007, 6–7. On rituals at Senate meetings, see Gell. *NA* 14.7.9. Suet. *Aug.* 35.3 and Dio 54.30.1 both claim that Augustus instituted the practice of requiring each senator to make a small sacrifice of incense on the altar of the god in whose temple the meeting was taking place. A meeting of the Senate had to take place within a *templum*, a space inaugurated by an augur (Gell. *NA* 14.7.7).

²¹ e.g. Clark 2007, 13–14; Rives 2013 (a review of Rüpke 2012b).

society that deserves special consideration. I have been influenced here by Jörg Rüpke's recent attempt to formulate a definition of "religion" as

the temporary and situational enlargement of the environment—judged as relevant by one or several of the actors—beyond the unquestionably plausible social environment inhabited by co-existing humans who are in communication (and hence observable).²²

That is, while Roman religion is so bound up with other aspects of Roman culture that it is not possible to speak of a strict sacred–secular dichotomy, in actions involving what is not "unquestionably plausible" there is nevertheless something sufficiently different from other actions that we can consider them to fall into a special category. What Rüpke thinks of as "beyond the unquestionably plausible", I will refer to as "the divine" or "the supernatural."

For the Romans, as for other ancient societies, appropriately maintaining this communication with an environment "beyond the unquestionably plausible" has important bearing on the success of their society: failing to observe correct ritual practice as it had traditionally been maintained could have serious consequences for the future. Jan Assmann has demonstrated this principle operating in the religion of Pharaonic Egypt, where hymns and cult acts performed in honor of the sun god were thought necessary for ensuring that the sun continued to rise and set, and therefore that human life would continue to survive and prosper.²³ From a Roman perspective, the concept of the *pax deorum* is important here: rituals had to be performed consistently in order to put Rome on good terms with her gods and ensure the community's survival; any departure from established practice, it was thought, could have dire consequences.²⁴ This is where "cultic" or "religious memory" adds something beyond "cultural" or "collective memory:" it is connected to the longevity of the community. Roman cultic memory ties Roman society not only strongly to its past, when the rites originated and became traditional through repeated performance, but also to its future, when repeated performance of the rites will guarantee continuation of the divine favor that allows Rome to prosper and succeed.

²² Rüpke 2015, 348; Rüpke also presented this definition at a lecture I attended in Aarhus, Denmark, on 10 April 2013. Cf. Rüpke 2012b, 108–9: "Roman religion could be loosely defined by the involvement of nonhuman actors, superhuman gods, who were supposed to form a controlling organization above peer review," as opposed to institutions (such as voting assemblies) that constituted "a public made up of those present."

²³ J. Assmann 2006, 139–54, esp. 153–4: "Ritual as a form of thought is an *officium memoriae*, a cultic memory service that daily sets a vast store of knowledge of the world in motion. Its purpose is not just to interpret the world, but to take the meaning it has elicited and to feed it back into the world to strengthen, foster, and rejuvenate it, through liturgical words of comfort and enactment of the ritual."

²⁴ For the *pax deorum*, see Linderski 2007; Bloch 1963, 82–3; MacBain 1982, 1–2; Ando 2008, 5–6; Santangelo 2011; for a slightly different view, Satterfield 2015.

An important part of Roman cultic memory, therefore, is the preservation of the details of religious practice. Its emphasis on ritual is an element of Roman pagan religious culture that scholars long considered excessively formalistic and devoid of emotional meaning.²⁵ Making sure that festivals take place on the right day or that sacrifices involve the correct victims slaughtered at the altar of the correct god may seem reasonable, but other provisions of Roman ritual may strike modern observers as bizarre. Is it really so important that the *flamen Dialis* never set foot outside the city of Rome, or that his parents be married by the increasingly outdated rite of *confarreatio*?²⁶ Does the birth of an intersex baby truly merit drowning the child at sea to remove a threat to the community?²⁷ Can the gods really demand that an entire set of games be repeated merely because a paterfamilias scourged his slave in the circus before the games had even begun?²⁸ The Roman answer to all these questions, apparently, was yes. Keeping track of all these rules, requirements, and prohibitions, or understanding the signs sent by the gods to inform humans that they had somehow lapsed in upholding these, was a vast undertaking, for which Rome's priests, priestesses, and other religious specialists were responsible. The guarding and handing down of this knowledge, perhaps with the help of specialist texts focusing on cultic information,²⁹ was seen as vitally important to the continuation of Roman religious traditions. This view of Roman religion as knowledge (*scientia*) has been explicitly connected by Rüpke with cultural memory: the preservation of ancient religious detail, so that it can be acted upon repeatedly in the present and future, is an essential component of Roman identity.³⁰

So, in Roman religion, a cultural memory that tethers Rome to its past merges with a ritual sensibility that seeks to adhere strictly to rites as they have traditionally been performed, in all their bewildering ritual detail, as a means of ensuring the gods' protection and divinely guaranteed success for the community in the future.³¹ This notion of the necessity of the perpetual repetition of ritual is exemplified in a poem of Horace. Among the images

²⁵ Feeney 1998, 3 notes the "powerful inertia" of this outdated scholarly view, which has happily been challenged by more recent scholarship (e.g. Hunt 2016).

²⁶ Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.58 and 4.16.2–3, with §3.3, pp. 142–4, and §4.3, pp. 177–80 and references there cited.

²⁷ See passages cited in Ch. 7 n. 134.

²⁸ Livy 2.36; on the interruption or vitiation of rites, see §2.6, pp. 115–16.

²⁹ See MacRae 2016, esp. ch. 2, for how such texts buttressed "the claim that this religious system had a traditional connection with the earliest period of Roman history" (50).

³⁰ Rüpke 2016 (on Valerius Maximus), and compare J. Assmann 2008, 114–15 and 2011, 39 on the role of specialists, such as priests and African griots, in the transmission of cultural knowledge. See also Ando 2008, 13–14 (lacking the memory dimension) and Gordon 1990, 198. Cf. J. Assmann 2011, 165–70 on the similar mnemonic function of the strict *nomos* (list of ritual prohibitions) associated with an Egyptian temple.

³¹ Cf. Satterfield 2015, 436: "Finding the *pax* [*deum*] through ritual helped to avert danger and secure success" and "was an important element in Roman self-understanding."

the poet uses to express his work's immortality is that of the infinite repetition of religious ritual:

non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
 vitabit Libitinam: usque ego postera
 crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium
 scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex.

(Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.6–9)

(I shall not entirely die, and a great part of myself
 shall escape Libitina: and I shall continually grow,
 fresh with later praise, as long as the pontiff
 climbs the Capitol with the silent virgin.)

Horace's vision of eternity is not tied simply to Rome itself, or even to the physicality of the Capitoline Hill, but to the ritual that takes place there, which he imagines will always endure; as Fraenkel says, "The future life of Rome with its unalterable ceremonies is taken for granted, if not to the end of all time, yet for so immense a period that no one needs to cast his thought beyond it."³² Horace does not specify a single occasion or festival, but rather, is economically referring to any and all of the great number of rituals that will be repeated on the Capitoline any number of times down the centuries.³³ Yet alongside this indeterminacy, we are also given specific ritual detail: the Vestal Virgin's silence, which alludes to the formula *favete linguis* (literally, "be favorable with your tongues!"—that is, avoid words of ill-omen by keeping silent) familiar in cultic contexts. Horace is interested not only that the *pontifex* and the Vestal climb the Capitoline, but also in *how* they climb the Capitoline; for him, Rome's eternity is embedded in such ritual details that must be remembered and continually repeated.

Roman mortals, then, had to preserve and enact the memory of their rites so that the gods would ensure that Rome would continue to exist. This is not to say that there was no room for alterations or additions to Roman ritual practice; despite the conservatism deeply embedded in this as in other aspects of Roman culture, Romans could, and did, alter, add, or even abandon rituals. From the perspective of cultural memory, this does not have to mean an abandonment of identity, nor does it necessarily constitute an offense to the gods with the potential to upset the cosmic order. At any time when it might be useful to do so, Romans could, and did, privilege more recent precedent over the most ancient examples when making decisions about religious practice.³⁴ Despite

³² Fraenkel 1957, 303.

³³ Nisbet and Rudd 2004, 373. Cf. West 2002, 263.

³⁴ Ando 2008, 15: "Romans could esteem the piety of their ancestors even as they recognized a necessity to act on the basis of more recent evidence When a conflict arose, knowledge acquired during the Hannibalic war, for example, necessarily trumped information of hoary antiquity."

Roman cultic conservatism, there were situations in which “older” did not absolutely mean “better.” This malleability is not out of keeping with the ways scholars have described the role of change or innovation in cultural memory: memory of the past is always constructed in the present.³⁵ Societies, just like individuals, remember selectively; sometimes old practices can be de-emphasized, and newer ones come to the fore, as the present situation demands. Cultic memory, just like cultural memory in general, is malleable, multivalent, and subject to a multitude of interpretations.³⁶

The changes to the ancient priesthood of the Arval Brethren (which had existed from at least the third century BC)³⁷ are a good example of departure from, or at least additions to, traditional cultic practice that appear to have been unproblematic. While the priesthood was traditionally dedicated to the cult of the obscure goddess Dea Dia, which took place in a grove outside Rome, it underwent large changes with the advent of the principate: a shrine of the Caesars was added to the sanctuary, and sacrifices for the safety of the emperor were added to its cultic calendar, sacrifices which probably did not take place in the grove, but rather on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, and were directed not to Dea Dia but to the Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva.³⁸ These alterations to the Arvals’ cultic memory—not only physical changes to their sanctuary and additions to their cultic calendar, but even a new location and different recipients for these new sacrifices—probably represent an unprecedented change when compared with what the Brethren practiced during the Republic (although a paucity of evidence for the earlier period makes it difficult to be certain). But presumably these changes in the priests’ ritual practice were not thought of as potentially jeopardizing the *pax deorum*, or they would not have been made. If anything, these rites might have been thought of as strengthening Rome’s relationship with the gods, by asking their favor and assistance for the emperors who now played such an outsized role in the community’s success. As we shall see, this idea will be particularly important in interpreting Tacitus’ *Annals*, which chronicle the Julio-Claudian principate and the changes it brings to Roman state and society, with concomitant changes to Roman cult practice.

I hope to have given a clear account of what I mean by cultic or religious memory (terms which I use interchangeably in what follows) when it comes to the study of Roman religion in general, and its application to the works of Tacitus in particular. Continued performance of ancient rituals and cult acts, with particular attention (though not necessarily an overly rigid adherence)

³⁵ See e.g. Olick 2008, 159 (“Memory is a process and not a thing... something... we do, not something... we have”); A. Assmann 2011, 19–20; J. Assmann 2011, 22–3, 27–8.

³⁶ See Halbwachs 1992, 86; Rüpke 2012a, 151: “Cultic memory is not objective” (*Kultische Erinnerung ist nicht objectiv*).

³⁷ Beard et al. 1998, i.194.

³⁸ Beard et al. 1998, i.195–6. The classic study of the priesthood is Scheid 1990.

to the detailed rules and prohibitions of Roman ritual practice, is both a key component of defining a Roman identity that is strongly linked with the past and also a necessary precondition for Rome's continued success and survival in the future. Cultic memory is an integral part of Roman cultural or collective memory, but at the same time has special qualities of its own that make it a distinct, and distinctly important, feature of Roman culture. As Anna Clark notes,

Public religion was not a separate sphere of Roman society: it might in fact usefully be conceived of as the register, permeating public life, that determined the tone of certain elements of the vocabularies of that public life, broadly understood. It thereby granted those elements a peculiarly intense explanatory force, a particular resonance in explaining and ordering the world.³⁹

As we shall see, part of my interest in analyzing cultic memory in the *Annals* is in the moments when, and methods by which, cultic memory interacts with other forms of commemoration that do not have an obvious ritual or divine component. In Clark's terms, when Tacitus invokes the religious register, how does that shape the tone of his observations on the nature of the principate? As I shall argue, Tacitus' religious material, when interpreted from the point of view of cultic memory, not only reinforces the observations other scholars have made about Tacitus' interpretation of the principate, but frequently also goes beyond mere reinforcement to help us understand previously unappreciated aspects of Tacitus' literary project and societal commentary in the *Annals*.

0.2 TACITUS, PRIEST AND HISTORIAN: TAKING THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION SERIOUSLY

Scholars have already observed that Tacitus is an author with a deep concern for memory. Typically, such studies have taken the form of examinations of Tacitus' views on remembering the past, and on direct or implicit comparisons between the past and the present (especially the Republican past and the Imperial present). Sometimes we see Tacitus' characters responding to their own memories of the past, as when observers of Augustus' funeral are struck by their own memories of, or the tales they have been told about, the death/funeral of Caesar.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Tacitus invites reflection on the power of history-writing to serve as a memorial of past events and people, as in his

³⁹ Clark 2007, 255–6.

⁴⁰ *Ann.* 1.8.6, with Gowing 2005, 28–32. Woodman 2002 makes a good case for regarding *illum diem* as a reference to the day not of Caesar's funeral, but of his assassination.

account of the trial and death of the historian Cremutius Cordus.⁴¹ At still other moments, Tacitus is interested in showing us how the emperors use their subjects' memories of the past to their own advantage, as with Otho's attempts to capitalize on Nero's popularity,⁴² or even attempt to control those memories, as with the aforementioned case of Cremutius Cordus, or in Tiberius' attempts to shape popular memories of Germanicus.⁴³

All of these examples, while powerful analyses of the place of memory in Tacitus' works, are more concerned with *individual* memories of the past than with questions of cultural memory. The present study aims to demonstrate a new way of thinking about memory in Tacitus, by considering what an examination of cultic memory, with its particular emphases and concerns, can do to refine our picture of memory in Tacitus' works. Tacitus includes in the *Annals* stories that involve the details of religious practice and priestly behavior, prodigies and their expiation, and ruminations in his own voice and that of his characters on the role of fate or providence in Roman affairs. The presence of this material suggests that Tacitus considers Rome's cultic memory and its potential consequences important enough to have a prominent place in his account of the Julio-Claudians.

But the religious material in Tacitus' works has typically not been considered to be very significant to his overall literary project. Ronald Syme's assessment of Tacitus' inclusion of prodigies, for example, seems to have had great influence on subsequent readers of Tacitus:

The recording of omens was a traditional feature in the annals of the Romans, and the effect of premonitory signs on the minds and actions of men provided a suitable commentary to great events. Idle fables were to be deprecated, but a serious author had no right to omit a well-authenticated manifestation... Not until the later books do the *prodigia* become a regular entry. It would be fanciful to discover a skeptical historian's relapse into antiquated credulities. The reason is plain: a stock device in the old annalistic tradition which Tacitus needed all the more because his subject now defied the fabric and canons of the 'res publica.'⁴⁴

For Syme, it is more palatable to assume that Tacitus occasionally referred to the gods, their cult, prodigies, fate, *fortuna*, etc. because they were part of the traditional material of the Roman historian, than to think that he wished to attach some larger meaning to them. Given Tacitus' general outlook, perceived by Syme and many before and after him to be dominated by skepticism, irony,

⁴¹ *Ann.* 4.34–5, with Cancik-Lindemaier and Cancik 1987; Moles 1998; Gowing 2005, 26–7; Sailor 2008, ch. 5; Shannon 2012, 764–5.

⁴² *Hist.* 1 *passim*, with Gowing 2016, 53–4.

⁴³ Gowing 2016, 54–9, and see also §3.2.

⁴⁴ Syme 1958, 522–3. Cf. Ginsburg 1981, 4; Martin 1981, 218. On the fact that prodigies are more common in the Claudian and Neronian books of the *Annals* than in the Tiberian hexad, see further below, p. 13. See also Syme 1958, 397, on Tacitus' inclusion of details such as the *figus Ruminalis* (13.28) or the altar of Hercules (15.41.1): "Such things had a place, like the report of 'prodigia,' in Roman annals, and an author's belief or disbelief does not come into the question."

and even sarcasm,⁴⁵ scholars have assumed that Tacitus' references to cultic matters were, if not mandated by the traditions of his genre, merely "an opportunity for gloomy and sardonic comments," or opportunities to criticize the credulity of those who allow their thoughts and actions to be excessively influenced by religious considerations.⁴⁶

More recently, Jason Davies and Miriam Griffin have sought to push back against Syme's view of Tacitean religious material,⁴⁷ and this study follows very much in their footsteps. Religious material in Tacitus should be taken seriously. I do not wish to discount the idea that an author can derive a strong literary effect from deploying religious material that was traditionally included in annalistic history. As we shall see, when Tacitus includes such material, he is certainly trying to exploit the assumptions it raises in his readers, but that need not mean that these references are merely pawns in the game of generic expectations. Let us further consider Syme's example of prodigies. Tacitus made a deliberate authorial choice about which prodigies to include and where to place them. The Roman historiographical tradition was strongly influenced by the *annales maximi*, in which the *pontifex maximus* listed important events of the year, especially prodigies recognized by the Senate.⁴⁸ Prodigies play a very important part of the narrative and thematic structuring of the *Ab Urbe Condita* of Tacitus' predecessor Livy.⁴⁹ Tacitus, while he hints at that traditional structuring of the narrative year according to prodigy and expiation, is far from following it slavishly.⁵⁰ At the other end of the spectrum is Sallust, whose extant works are known for their paucity of religious material and near total lack of prodigies.⁵¹ This shows that prodigies, while perhaps

⁴⁵ Syme 1958, ch. 30 (entitled "The sceptical historian"), esp. pp. 398 ("The prime quality of Cornelius Tacitus is distrust"), 539 ("The irony of Tacitus pervades whole episodes...or is compressed into a curt phrase"), and 542 ("The ironical manner of Tacitus derives its strength from a keen and malicious insight, which he scarcely troubles to disguise"). Cf. e.g. Furneaux 1896, 36–7 on a "satiric tendency" in the *Annals*; Walker 1952, 53; Mellor 1993, 129–30; O'Gorman 2000, 10–13; Owen and Gildenhard 2013, 27–8.

⁴⁶ Goodyear 1972, 25–6 n. 2; cf. Hutchinson 1993, 240–50. A partial exception is Walker 1952, ch. 12, who attributes to Tacitus cynicism or skepticism in various religious matters, but nevertheless describes him as "a man of strongly religious temperament" (244) who "did not reject entirely the idea of supernatural direction" (245); see also Furneaux 1896, 30.

⁴⁷ Davies 2004, ch. 4; Griffin 2009, 169–72.

⁴⁸ Rawson 1971; Ginsburg 1981, 4. Cornell 2013, ii.10–31 collects fragments of the *annales maximi* (with commentary, Cornell 2013, iii.3–12). Historians perhaps stopped using them directly as a source by the time of Cicero, and they may even have disappeared (Frier 1979, 274; Drews 1988; for a slightly more measured view, see Rich in Cornell 2013, i.156–8).

⁴⁹ The classic study is Levene 1993, of which see esp. p. 36: "We should...seek to explain [prodigy lists] in terms of his narrative strategy." See also Davies 2004, 28–58.

⁵⁰ The classic study is Ginsburg 1981, of which see esp. pp. 29–30 on prodigies.

⁵¹ On Sallust, see Syme 1964, 246–8; Scanlon 1980, 41–7; Levene 2006, 423 (on the lack of prodigies); Rosenblitt 2011, 406. The picture of Sallust's approach to religion, however, might look very different if all of his works had survived. For an example of another historian who may have felt as Sallust did, see Gell. *NA* 2.28.4–7 on M. Porcius Cato: "It is not pleasing to write about whatever is on the *tabula* at the house of the *pontifex maximus*" (*non lubet scribere quod in*

“traditional” for historiography, were not considered an essential element of the genre; if Tacitus had wanted to write a work of history that was entirely devoid of religious material, he would have had good precedent. Comparing the *Annals* with other works about the Julio-Claudians is also instructive. Tacitus’ contemporary Suetonius includes more prodigious or ominous occurrences in his account of the Julio-Claudians than Tacitus does,⁵² demonstrating that the tradition surrounding the Julio-Claudians contained a multiplicity of possible omens to include.

Tacitus’ selection of such reports, therefore, begins to look more discerning the more one examines it. Tacitus certainly inserts himself into a historiographical tradition, but does not take the extreme of either Sallust or Livy, and makes a very careful selection amongst the recorded Julio-Claudian prodigies available to him. Furthermore, a consideration of where in the narrative these prodigies occur also suggests deliberate authorial planning. There are many more prodigies in the Claudian and Neronian books of the *Annals* than in the Tiberian hexad.⁵³ While sweeping pronouncements should be avoided, given that we do not know how, or indeed whether, Tacitus handled prodigies or other religious material in the portions of the *Annals* that are now missing,⁵⁴ it appears that communications from the gods were important to the historian’s vision of the later *principes* in a way that they were not when he was thinking about Tiberius. That is also suggestive; presumably if there had been nothing more to Tacitus’ inclusion of prodigies than a desire to make his work look appropriately traditional, the prodigies would have been more equally distributed than they are.

A detail of Tacitus’ biography also lends credence to the suggestion that his interest in cultic matters was motivated by more than the conventions of his genre: his concern with details about priestly responsibilities and cult practice has been attributed to his position as a *quindecimvir*,⁵⁵ a priesthood granted to him by Domitian and probably held for the remainder of Tacitus’ life.⁵⁶ The *quindecimvirate* was a prestigious office; it is an unusual honor for Tacitus to have acquired at such a young age (prior to attaining the

tabula apud pontificem maximum est, an allusion to the prodigy records of the *annales maximi*) (see Cornell 2013, iii.127–9).

⁵² Davies 2004, 160. For example, Tacitus includes in the *Histories* only two *ostenta* predicting Vespasian’s success, while Suetonius reports eleven, although his biography of Vespasian is quite short (Wardle 2012, 185–6). On ominous occurrences in Suetonius, see Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 191–3.

⁵³ See §4.2, pp. 169–70, §6.1, and §6.5.

⁵⁴ See §6.1.

⁵⁵ e.g. Syme 1958, 465 (on the digressions on Sarapis and Paphian Venus in the *Histories*) and 469–70 (on material on the Christians and the oracle of Apollo at Claros in the *Annals*).

⁵⁶ Rüpke 2008, 646.

consulship) and signalled the Imperial favor that was to be followed with further magistracies.⁵⁷ In addition to the cultic functions of such posts, for the recipients, they were markers of elite political status, just like praetorships or consulships.⁵⁸ Syme acknowledges that Tacitus' priesthood may have informed his interest in things like oracles, but also seems to believe that it was mainly important for the political advantage it conferred.⁵⁹ But when Tacitus, in a rare moment of authorial commentary, discusses his own tenure as quindecimvir, he highlights the active role it gave him in significant rituals:

Isdem consulibus ludi saeculares octingentesimo post Romam conditam, quarto et sexagesimo, quam Augustus ediderat, spectati sunt. utriusque principis rationes praetermitto, satis narratas libris, quibus res imperatoris Domitiani composui. nam is quoque edidit ludos saecularis iisque intentius adfui sacerdotio quindecimvirali praeditus ac tunc praetor; quod non iactantia refero sed quia collegio quindecimvirum antiquitus ea cura et <ii> magistratus potissimum exequabantur officia caerimoniarum. (11.11.1)

(Under the same consuls, the Secular Games were watched, in the 800th year since Rome's founding, and the 64th since the Games which Augustus had given. I pass over the calculation systems of each *princeps*, which are sufficiently narrated in the books in which I wrote about the affairs of the commander Domitian. For he also put on Secular Games, and I was present at them with particular keenness, endowed as I was with the quindecimviral priesthood, and praetor at that time. This I mention not for the sake of boasting, but because this had been a concern for the college of the quindecimvirs from of old, and those magistrates in particular were carrying out the duties of the ceremonies.)

Self-reference of this sort is rare for Tacitus; use of the first-person singular marks the passage as significant,⁶⁰ and we should not overlook the fact that it is specifically in order to remark upon his own priesthood, and the authority it grants him as an historian, that he deploys it here. As both quindecimvir and praetor, Tacitus suggests that he was doubly qualified to assist Domitian.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Syme 1958, 66; Birley 2000, 234. It was probably listed on Tacitus' tombstone as an important component of his career (*CIL* 6.1574; see Birley 2000, 235–6).

⁵⁸ See Beard et al. 1998, i.27–30, 103–8; they assert that despite priests' involvement in political life, the religious nature of their office must be taken seriously. See also Várhelyi 2010, 57–69.

⁵⁹ Syme 1958, 65, 523.

⁶⁰ See Syme 1958, 534; Pelling 2009, 152. Woodman 2009, 38–9 argues persuasively that Tacitus' "reference" to himself and his own career in actuality "is the focus and climax of the digression" about the Secular Games, not a case where Tacitus "grudgingly concede[s]" (Syme 1958, 534) details about his own life.

⁶¹ I accept the insertion of *ii* by Shaw-Smith 1997, which Malloch 2013, 187 rejects, instead following Nipperdey, 1852, 9 n. 16; Furneaux 1907, 16; and Koestermann 1967, 49 in interpreting the sentence as suggesting that "those *quindecimviri* who held magistracies were selected by preference (*potissimum*) for the performance of the duties of the religious ceremonies." But there is no evidence for this outside of Tacitus.

Praetors, too, were involved in maintaining the traditional form of the associated rituals (*caerimoniae*),⁶² but the quindecimvirate is particularly meaningful because of the long continuity (*antiquitus*) of that priesthood's concern for the games. To speak in anachronistic terms, cultic memory, as reflected in continuity of religious practice, mattered to Tacitus. It is also significant that Tacitus, momentarily leaving aside the political problems of Domitian's notorious regime, can remark neutrally on his celebration of the Secular Games.⁶³ He does not seem to criticize the games—neither the calculation of the year when they should be held,⁶⁴ nor the rites themselves—even as celebrated by this worst of emperors. Tacitus also reveals that in the *Historiae* (presumably in a portion of the text that has now been lost), he discussed how each emperor calculated the date for the Secular Games. More than once, then, Tacitus discussed the detailed expert knowledge necessary for this festival, and it is likely that his own personal experience was also brought to bear on the discussion in the *Historiae*. Such details are not confined to the Secular Games or even the reign of Claudius, as we shall see. Tacitus combines his role as priest, charged with preserving Rome's religious rites by continued performance during his own lifetime, and his role as historian, concerned with reporting these rites in all their bewildering detail.⁶⁵ Although how the emperors react to such religious details is certainly not insignificant, Tacitus can also preserve them without authorial comment.

Both of Tacitus' twin roles as priest and historian, then, would give him good reason for including religious material in his works. Reports of prodigies and observations on supernatural forces such as fate and fortune typically found a place in the genre of historiography. Furthermore, Tacitus, as a member of the quindecimviral college—the priesthood charged with interpreting prodigies with the aid of the Sibylline books, as well as with assisting in the carrying out of important rituals such as the Secular Games—might have had particular knowledge of and interest in the interpretation of ominous occurrences and the details of cult practice. But this need not mean that religious material in his works has no deeper significance than generic convention or personal interest: as I shall argue, it plays a crucial and thus far underappreciated thematic role in Tacitus' account of the Julio-Claudian principate. As Ailsa Hunt, building on the work of Denis Feeney, has recently argued, the writing and reading

⁶² *Caerimoniae* designates religious observance but has a range of meanings, from “religious taboos” (3.58.1) to “rites, ceremonies” (3.59.2); see Woodman and Martin 1996, 423, 425.

⁶³ Malloch 2013, 180–1.

⁶⁴ Syme 1958, 65. On the passage, see further §6.2.

⁶⁵ See Marincola 1997, 109–12 for examples of ancient historians who cite priesthoods that they personally hold as granting them a special authority or access to privileged information. MacRae 2016, 55–9 notes that some (though by no means all) of the specialist religious literature of the late Republic was written by priests, suggesting that priesthood could grant a similar authority in a more overtly “theological” genre.

of literature can be an important way for ancient authors and readers to engage in religious thought:

We need to recognise that literature is itself a form of religion. Literature is what I would call a ‘theological voice’ (and a powerful one at that) which, in tandem with other voices, built up Roman religious discourse. Writing literature was one way of articulating and engaging with theological questions; reading literature was another. Thus . . . I approach those texts as a form of theological thinking in action . . . Being ‘literary’ in no way weakens the value of these texts’ theological insights.⁶⁶

If we are willing to read Tacitus in this way, his inclusion of religious material becomes not just another vessel for political commentary upon the Julio-Claudian line and the (generally negative) changes it has brought about in Roman society, although it serves that purpose, too. It is also a way of thinking about the gods and the nature of humans’ relationship with them. While I would not wish to claim Tacitus as a “theologian,” there are points in his work where what we might call theological work is being done, in that he is inviting the reader to think about the place of the divine in human history. Taking this material seriously, and analyzing it on its own terms, is crucial for a fuller understanding of the *Annals*.

The *Annals*, of course, were not Tacitus’ first work, nor were they the first place he grappled with these sorts of questions. Already in the *Histories*, Tacitus includes many references to fate, fortune, omens, prophecies, and signs.⁶⁷ When Tacitus programmatically sets out the types of material he will consider in the *Histories*’ proem, meditations on the divine and the question of its involvement in human affairs are explicitly included:⁶⁸

praeter multiplicis rerum humanarum casus caelo terraque prodigia et fulminum monitus et futurorum praesagia, laeta tristia, ambigua manifesta; nec enim umquam atrocioribus populi Romani cladibus magisque iustis indiciis adprobaturum est non esse curae deis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem. (*Hist.* 1.3.2)

(Beyond these manifold disasters in human affairs, there were prodigies in heaven and on earth, warnings given by thunderbolts, and presages of the future—happy and sad, ambiguous and obvious; and never has it been proven by more terrible

⁶⁶ Hunt 2016, 20; see also Feeney 1998, esp. the introduction.

⁶⁷ e.g. *Hist.* 1.10.3, 1.18.1, 1.27.1, 1.62.3, 1.86, 2.1.1–2, 2.3–4, 2.11.1, 2.12.1, 2.47.1, 2.50.2, 2.78, 2.91.1, 3.56.1–2, 3.71–2, 4.53.1–2, 4.61, 4.81–4, 5.2–10. On religious material in the *Histories*, see Henrichs 1968; Scott 1968; Morgan 1993, 1996, 2000; Haynes 2003, 117–20; Davies 2004, ch. 4 *passim*; Feldherr 2009; Luke 2010; Hicks 2013; Shannon 2014.

⁶⁸ Woodman 1988, 160–7 is the classic treatment of the proem’s programmatic character, which corresponds closely to Cicero’s precepts regarding the ideal contents of historical works in *De Oratore*. For *Hist.* 1.2–4 as a “table of contents,” see Damon 2003, 82. See also Shannon 2014, 273–5.

disasters for the Roman people or by fuller⁶⁹ portents that the gods care not about our peace of mind, but about vengeance.)

As often in Tacitus' works, his language leaves the exact meaning of the sentence unclear. The abstract noun *ultio* is modified by *nostra*, equivalent to a genitive, but *ultio* can be used either with an objective genitive of the person avenged ("the vengeance taken on us," presumably by the gods), or with a subjective genitive of the agent of vengeance ("the vengeance taken by us").⁷⁰ It is unclear whether Tacitus means that prodigies truly express divine anger, or that they merely mark divine interest in human affairs without indicating that the gods intend to become involved. The idea of prodigies as divine vengeance for humans' breaking of the *pax deorum* is left open as one interpretation of Tacitus' words. Yet the vengeance humans take on each other is such a major feature of the *Histories*⁷¹ that it is equally possible that Tacitus intends to use prodigies to highlight events and themes on a human level. Admittedly, the notion that the Romans deserve these dire omens (*iustis indicis*) inclines the reader toward the first interpretation, but the other reading also remains available.

Therefore, even when Tacitus does give a programmatic statement that appears intended to guide the reader in the interpretation of signs from the gods, in fact he does not offer much in the way of clarity. Things are even murkier in the *Annals*, whose proem lacks a programmatic section of this sort;⁷² there is nothing to guide the reader in interpreting signs or any other kind of religious material. It is tempting to interpret passages such as Tacitus' rumination on fate (*Ann.* 6.22)⁷³ as offering a similar kind of programmatic guidance, but the placement of the passage and its ambiguous nature disqualify it from serving such a function. So while religious material is clearly important enough to Tacitus that he includes it when he need not have done so, and even broadcasts his authoritative position as a member of one of the most important priestly *collegia* in the Roman state cult, he gives us no explicit guidance on exactly *how* religious material is important. More theological work, then, for the reader: as we progress through the narrative and encounter such material, we must grapple with it unassisted and attempt to interpret it in its context.

⁶⁹ For this translation of *magisve iustis*, see Damon 2003, 97.

⁷⁰ OLD s.v. *ultio* b. Damon 2003, 97 assumes only the former meaning: "*nostram* is active with *securitatem*, passive with *ultionem*."

⁷¹ Scott 1968, 47–8.

⁷² Woodman 1988, 168 observes that the preface of the *Annals* is "notable for what it omits rather than for what it says... From this laconic statement [*Ann.* 1.3] the reader is left to draw what further conclusions he can about the narrative which begins with the very next sentence."

⁷³ On the passage, see further §5.5.

0.3 TYPES OF MATERIAL

One of the difficulties in writing a study of religious material in the *Annals* is its sheer variety: many types of reports are included, and each one relates to cultic memory, and interacts with the other types of material, in its own way. The material I consider can be grouped into three broad categories: traditional cult practice; cultic commemoration of emperors and their family members (Imperial cult); and attempts to understand the divine and its workings.

One category of material concerns what we might consider the cult of the gods as it had been traditionally practiced; this mostly comprises rites of the state religion, but some consideration is also given to the practices of other communities within the bounds of the Roman Empire. I have been guided here by Aleida Assmann's useful list of media that transmit memory in religion:⁷⁴ calendars (how do Tacitus' Romans preserve or change the traditional scheduling of religious festivals?); architecture (what determines the building of or alterations to temples and other religious monuments?); liturgy (do Tacitus' Romans celebrate festivals in the same ways as their ancestors?); and images (how do they treat cult statues?). In addition to these, Tacitus is also interested in priests and their traditional functions.⁷⁵ When Tacitus introduces such material, I am interested in analyzing it from the perspective of memory and forgetfulness. When the trappings of traditional ritual appear, to what extent are they maintained in the ancestral manner? When or how is continuity upset, or preserved? Is continuity always valorized, or are there times when innovation is salutary or necessary? When are the traditional roles of figures such as priests and other religious experts respected, and when are they altered or ignored? What about the role of Senate? How does the presence of the emperor complicate these roles, or affect the continuity of religious traditions?

Observations on the veneration of emperors is another category of religious material Tacitus includes, and one that is particularly important for understanding how cultic and cultural memory intersect.⁷⁶ Another thread I will follow through the *Annals* is moments when the emperors and their relatives are remembered by being inscribed into cult practice, cultic spaces, and ritual calendars, a process I term "cultic commemoration." In other words, what happens when those same aspects of cultic memory I noted above (calendars, architecture, liturgy, images, and priests) are used to commemorate emperors and other members of Rome's ruling house? Effectively, it turns them into

⁷⁴ A. Assmann 2008, 100. See also J. Assmann 2011, 6–7; Rüpke 2012a, 140.

⁷⁵ Davies 2004, 185–7 emphasizes that priests do not perform their traditional role as "trusted experts" nearly as often in Tacitus as in Livy; nevertheless, as I shall show, there is still evidence to demonstrate that Tacitus is interested in priests' traditional functions.

⁷⁶ For an example of the application of cultural memory theory to ruler cult, see Noreña 2015.

gods, pushing them, in Rüpke's terms, "beyond the unquestionably plausible social environment inhabited by co-existing humans who are in communication." Emperor cult fits this definition, in that deceased former emperors are not coexistent, observable, or in communication with those who offer them acts of worship.⁷⁷

The question of whether the Romans "really" thought of their deified former emperors as gods in some ontological sense has been a frequent problem in the study of emperor cult, but for Tacitus, the question is largely irrelevant. There is no evidence that he is aiming to make a statement about whether any former emperor is or is not actually a divinity.⁷⁸ Rather, he focuses on how Augustus' deification affects the relationship between emperor and subject; for one of the themes of the *Annals* is the way that cultic commemoration of deceased emperors appears to affect the way living ones are treated. From the very beginning of the *Annals*, the worship of *divus Augustus* looms large, especially as it relates to the way Tiberius himself is perceived and treated by his subjects. As Jan Assmann puts it, "rulership needs a pedigree" (*Herrschaft braucht Herkunft*):⁷⁹ alignment of himself with his predecessor is an important part of Tiberius' legitimation of his own rule. But when that "pedigree" includes a god (and one who lived not during the quasi-mythical era of Rome's foundation, but within the current ruler's own lifetime), the line between divine predecessor and living emperor becomes blurred, and worship of Tiberius' deified predecessor sets a precedent for quasi-worshipful attitudes to the living *princeps*. There is also the further question of the cultic commemoration of *relatives* of the emperor. Should these be seen as intermediate steps (*Zwischenstufen*) along the road to the "full" divinity possessed by the emperor,⁸⁰ as an allowable outgrowth of the worship of *divus Augustus*, or a worrying development that memorializes humans using means appropriate only for the gods?

In the *Annals*, emperor cult is practiced in many forms by many types of people. The cultic commemoration of emperors encompasses a wide variety of practices and actors, from the voting of divine honors to Augustus by the Senate in the early days of Tiberius' reign (*Ann.* 1.11.1), to Tiberius' own performance of a sacrifice before a statue of Augustus (4.52.2), to the apparently spontaneous offer by communities in Asia and Spain (4.15.3, 4.37.1) to

⁷⁷ Gradel 2002, 5 defines religion as "between humans and what they perceive as 'another world'," which he finds problematic for explaining emperor cult; Rüpke's definition eliminates some of these difficulties.

⁷⁸ Clauss 1999, 23; cf. Gradel 2002, 5. On Tacitus, see Davies 2004, 177. Some passages of Tacitus could conceivably be interpreted as criticizing emperor cult *tout court*, but only if taken out of their narrative context (e.g. *Hist.* 4.61.3, on the Germans' worship of Velede, with Davies 2004, 178). Likewise, the criticisms of Augustus' deification at *Ann.* 1.10.6 are spoken by his critics, not the historian himself; see §1.2.

⁷⁹ J. Assmann 1992, 71.

⁸⁰ See Clauss 1999, 37.

build temples whose dedicatees include the living emperor Tiberius.⁸¹ These instances of cult include both “top-down” state-sponsored worship, for which the Senate gave approval and the state provided funds and personnel, and acts of worship firmly outside the realm of state cult that represent a “bottom-up,” spontaneous action by individuals or communities throughout the empire.⁸²

Finally, there is the category of what I call attempts to understand the divine and its workings. Here, the relationship to cultic memory (rather than religious thought in general) is less obvious. Partly, as I shall show, references to this type of material gain meaning through their position in Tacitus’ narrative: when juxtaposed with observations on ritual details or emperor cult, attempts to understand the divine affect how we read Tacitus’ observations on the nexus of memory and ritual, and vice versa. In particular, Tacitus’ characters’ attempts to understand the divine sometimes bring them into conflict with traditional notions of how humans are supposed to interact with their gods, or show their fundamental misunderstanding of those notions; the best example of this will be Germanicus (Chapter 2).

Crucially important is Tacitus’ use of the language of fate (*fatum*) and fortune (*fortuna*) or chance (*fors*), which represents an attempt to make sense of the vast timescale on which the divine operates. Discerning Tacitus’ views on this is a problem that has particularly troubled scholars.⁸³ Sometimes, he seems to favor overarching *fatum* as an explanation, at other times, the chance workings of *fors/fortuna*. The two views are found juxtaposed throughout his work, which may, as Kroymann observes, be part of the point: “They stand in juxtaposition and opposition as tensions, and they must remain standing as tensions”, rather than being dismissed as a change of the author’s views.⁸⁴

Although fate is mentioned with roughly the same frequency in the extant portions of the *Annals* and *Histories*,⁸⁵ fate in the *Annals* seems less coherent. In the *Histories*, eight out of the sixteen references to *fatum* indicate Vespasian’s destiny to ascend to the throne, or the destiny of his opponents to be defeated.⁸⁶ By contrast, there are only a few indications in the *Annals* that fate may be

⁸¹ On the passages, see §4.3 and §4.4.

⁸² For the important distinction between state cult and other forms of emperor worship, see Gradel 2002, esp. ch. 12.

⁸³ e.g. Kroymann 1952, with a survey of previous German scholarship; Walker 1952, 244–54; Syme 1958, 521–7. More recently see Davies 2004, 171–6; Griffin 2009, 168–72.

⁸⁴ Kroymann 1952, 159: “Sie stehen . . . als Spannungen im Nebeneinander und Gegeneinander, und sie müssen als Spannungen stehenbleiben.” He argues against the views of Fabia 1914 and Reitzenstein 1927 (Kroymann 1952, 154–8), but still seems to allow for a change in the final books of the *Annals*.

⁸⁵ *Fatum* or *fatalis* appears once for every 14.6 Teubner pages of the *Annals*, as compared to every 13.9 pages of the *Histories*.

⁸⁶ Flavian *fatum*: *Hist.* 1.10, 2.82, 3.1, 5.13. Demise of competitors: *Hist.* 1.18, 1.29, 1.71, 3.84. Cf. also *Agr.* 13.3. On fate in the *Histories*, see recently Shannon 2014, 276–7.

involved in determining who will rule.⁸⁷ Sometimes that task involves *fortuna*, as when Claudius emerges as “the *princeps*-to-be that Fortune was keeping in hiding,” and Tacitus marks his unexpected elevation as an example of “the mockeries of mortal affairs” (*Ann.* 3.18.4 *ludibria rerum mortalium*).⁸⁸ Even here, however, it is not clear whether *fortuna* represents an element of chance, randomness, or divine capriciousness in the way events unfold, as it occasionally does in the *Histories*.⁸⁹ *Fortuna*, it must be remembered, is also a goddess in the Roman pantheon, associated with prophecy and possessing a popular oracular shrine at Praeneste; as such, it frequently may also have overtones of providence rather than chance.⁹⁰ So each time *fortuna* appears in Tacitus’ narrative, we must ask ourselves whether it appears to signify a force that is more providential or more random.

As with Tacitus’ approach to prodigies, despite the lack of clarity and inconsistency in his usage of the concepts of *fatum* and *fortuna*, it is still nevertheless possible for the reader to see *fatum* and *fortuna* in action as real and efficacious forces. Yet in the *Annals* we are given no universally applicable dictum as to how this might actually work. The closest we get is *Annals* 6.22, in which Tacitus muses on the place of *fatum* and *fortuna* in historical causation: “When I hear such things as these, my judgment is uncertain whether it is by fate and immutable necessity, or by chance, that mortals’ affairs unfold” (*Ann.* 6.22.1 *sed mihi haec ac talia audienti in incerto iudicium est, fatone res mortalium et necessitate immutabili an forte volvantur*). While it might be tempting to read *Annals* 6.22 as a manifesto on Tacitus’ views on fate, the overwhelming impression of the passage is one of uncertainty rather than of clarification; Ronald Martin is surely right to state that “it is more prudent to accept what [Tacitus] says at the beginning of the chapter,” i.e. his expression of his own uncertainty on the question.⁹¹ It is also important to take account of the context: Tacitus is not talking here about *fatum* in general, but about astrology in particular. There is also a third possible viewpoint to which Tacitus gives voice here, supposedly that of “the man-in-the-street” (6.22.3), according

⁸⁷ e.g. 1.3.3 (fate perhaps had something to do with Gaius Caesar’s death, a factor that made Tiberius’ ascendancy possible), 6.46.3 (Tiberius’ refusal to name heirs, which allowed Caligula to take over, is equivalent to leaving the decision to fate; see §5.5, pp. 233–5), 16.5.3 (Vespasian’s *maius fatum* keeps him safe under Nero; see §7.9, p. 334).

⁸⁸ See further §3.2, pp. 137–40.

⁸⁹ Cf. Otho’s relationship to *fortuna*, *Hist.* 2.12.1 and 47.1, with Ash 2007a, 110, 204.

⁹⁰ For the worship of *fortuna*, see Champeaux 1982; Davies 2004, 118; Clark 2007, 194–6, 233–43; Matthews 2011, ch. 1 (esp. pp. 21–8 on Fortuna at Praeneste). For *fortuna* as providence or divine justice in literature, see Matthews 2011, 136–41.

⁹¹ Martin 2001, 149. Cf. Sinclair 1995, 55–6. Woodman 2016, 170–1 has recently emphasized the aesthetic and rhetorical dimensions of the passage, noting that the question of whether the world is governed by providence was sometimes debated in rhetorical schools (e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 3.5.6).

to Martin,⁹² which seems to suggest that fate is an important component of how things happen in history, at least insofar as it pertains to astrology.

Indeed, Tacitus seems to come down in favor of astrological determinism;⁹³ and astrology, along with similar “occult” practices such as magic and necromancy, is often a vehicle for Tacitus to invite his reader to consider the workings of the divine. The *Annals* contain several references to astrology and the taking of horoscopes, sometimes by (alleged) pretenders to the throne who are supposedly consulting astrologers in an attempt to ascertain their chances, or a relative’s chances, of deposing the current emperor and ruling in his place.⁹⁴ But astrologers are also consulted by the emperors themselves, or by members of the Imperial house. Tacitus sometimes maligns practitioners of astrology, or criticizes those who interpret its predictions too hastily. Nevertheless, astrological predictions in the *Annals* mostly end up coming true.⁹⁵ Even if Tacitus does not wish us to view everything that happens to Rome under the Julio-Claudians as the ineluctable will of the stars, with these references he does invite the reader to consider the relationship between the principate and the divine.

0.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

Given the disparate nature of the types of material I will consider, it would have been possible to analyze each type of material one by one—in other words, to structure my analysis thematically. This is indeed the approach taken by Jason Davies in his recent examination of religion in Tacitus.⁹⁶ What I have opted for instead is a chronological analysis: I proceed one by one through each book of the *Annals* taking religious material as it comes and consider what effect it would have on a reader progressing sequentially through the narrative. Apart from occasional deviations where I believe it helpful for the reader to be presented with a passage “out of order,”⁹⁷ I largely follow the order in which Tacitus arranged the episodes I consider.

This approach is warranted for several reasons. The physical form of ancient book rolls meant that it was easier to read them straight through than to jump around to different portions of the work, given that rolling and unrolling the papyrus roll would have been more difficult than flipping backward and forward in a codex; therefore, a sequential reading of each book is the way of interacting with the text Tacitus may have had in mind for his

⁹² Martin 2001, 149. ⁹³ See Woodman 2016, 181–3.

⁹⁴ e.g. 2.32.3, 12.22.1, 12.52.1–3, 16.14.1–2. ⁹⁵ Davies 2004, 166.

⁹⁶ Davies 2004, ch. 4. ⁹⁷ As e.g. in §1.1.

putative reader when composing the *Annals*.⁹⁸ Tacitus could, and did, use this expectation of sequential reading to achieve important literary effects. As Levene has convincingly demonstrated in his analysis (also structured sequentially) of religious material in Livy,⁹⁹ part of what is important about the religious material in a historical work is where in his narrative the historian chooses to situate it, and the effect it has on the reader proceeding sequentially through textual time. My sequential-reading analysis of the *Annals* highlights important juxtapositions of religious material and religious language, shows how Tacitus depicts important religious ideas and trends developing over time, and allows for speculation about the effect of unexpected developments on the reader. This is particularly important for the *Annals* given the wide variety of types of religious material Tacitus includes: part of what is significant is the juxtaposition and interrelation of these different concerns.

The other advantage to a sequential-reading approach is that it allows one to assess whether and, if so, how, Tacitus is trying to show or suggest that the way the Julio-Claudian emperors approached cultic questions changed over time. One of the disadvantages of Davies's study, structured thematically rather than chronologically, is that it creates a picture of religion in Tacitus that is monolithic and does not allow for the shades of difference between *principes* and developments across the entire narrative of the *Annals* (and indeed between the *Annals* and the *Histories*, which have a religious character very different from that of the *Annals*, as Davies's synthesizing treatment sometimes obscures). I have chosen to structure my analysis according to the reigns of different emperors, in order to highlight the differences in Tacitus' portrayals of each *princeps*: each reign has its own approach to cultic memory, and the continuities and developments that link these approaches offer crucial insights into Tacitus' conception of the progression of the history of the principate.

Much of my analysis concerns the Tiberian hexad (Chapters 1–5), with Claudius (Chapter 6) and Nero (Chapter 7) receiving treatment in one chapter each. The reason for this imbalance is that the first hexad lays out many of the important themes and questions for a religious analysis of the *Annals*. In the Claudian and Neronian books, Tacitus revisits these themes and questions

⁹⁸ On the physical form of the ancient book and its effect upon reading habits, see Van Sickle 1980, esp. pp. 5–6; Small 1997, 11–19; Cavallo 1999, 84–5 (for the notion that ease of cross-referencing is an advantage of the codex format over the book roll; for a different view see Johnson 2009, 267). Starr 1981 notes that Tacitus' practice with "cross-references," like that of other authors, is to refer mainly (though not exclusively) to passages that are close by, and to provide "short summaries for the reader's convenience;" this also suggests that sequential reading, rather than skipping around, is what Tacitus envisioned. The *Annals*, however, would have comprised many papyrus rolls, and there is of course no guarantee that ancient readers would read all the rolls, or that they would read them in order.

⁹⁹ Levene 1993.

to show how they have developed, but it is in the Tiberian books that they are gradually established. Their development therefore needs extraordinarily careful analysis and more detailed examination. It is also the case that in the Tiberian hexad there seems to be the greatest degree of change over time: Tacitus' books 1–6 chronicle the gradual development or solidification of many things about the principate, including its approach to cultic memory, and then the way Tiberius' increasingly withdrawn and secretive approach to ruling pushes those trends even further. I analyze Tiberius' first grapplings with religious questions in *Annals* 1–2 in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 deals with the same books, but from a different perspective: that of Germanicus, a religious actor in his own right, whose approach to cultic memory is just as flawed as Tiberius' despite his apparent status as a potential redeemer of the Julio-Claudians. Chapter 3 covers *Annals* 3, in which questions of memory and commemoration come to the fore with renewed vigor after Germanicus' death, and in which the Senate has to come to terms with how it will perform its traditionally central role in the settling of cultic questions in a society where the emperor increasingly makes all the important decisions. *Annals* 4, the subject of Chapter 4, continues to offer some of the same questions, but also represents a turning point, as the gods' wrath becomes increasingly manifest. Toward the end of Tiberius' life, chronicled in *Annals* 5–6 (Chapter 5), another shift occurs: questions about the role of fate invite the reader to think about Rome's larger trajectory. Tacitus' accounts of the principates of Claudius and Nero show how two of Tiberius' successors deal with the religious system they have inherited: the mistakes they make are increasingly clear-cut, in comparison with the shifting, murky religious world of the Tiberian principate, but it is also apparent that Claudius' and Nero's mistakes are a logical extension of the problems Tiberius raised. Claudius (Chapter 6) represents a laudable attempt to renew interest in Rome's cultic memory, but the deeply flawed nature not only of Claudius' own reign, but also of the principate in general, means that this is only marginally successful and does not make much difference to Rome's apparent collision-course with the gods' anger. Under Nero (Chapter 7), the full extent of the gods' wrath, and of the brokenness of Rome's system of cultic memory, finally becomes clear. This progressive analysis of the religious material in the *Annals* offers a new way of understanding the work: as a narrative of a system of government (the principate) that becomes increasingly irreligious as its first dynasty progresses, but whose problems are due not only to the actions of its individual members, but also to the inherent flaws the system itself has introduced into the way Rome interacts with her gods.

Tiberius the Autocrat

1.1 INTRODUCTION: *TIBERIUS PERINDE DIVINA HUMANAQUE OBTEGENS*

It is typically advisable to begin at the beginning; but for *Annals* 1, we will begin near its end. Before we embark upon a sequential reading of the book, a closer look at a passage where Tiberius is confronted with a flood of the Tiber River (*Ann.* 1.76.1) early in his principate (AD 15) provides a clearer picture of Tiberius than do the complex, shifting dynamics of the first part of *Annals* 1, where his accession to the throne is described. In this later episode, the emperor must respond not only to the destruction of property and loss of life caused by the flood in low-lying areas of Rome, but also to the religious problem it seems to represent. In this one episode, narrated in two short passages, Tacitus tells the reader much about what kind of emperor Tiberius is and about the consequences for how he approaches questions of religious interpretation.

Eodem anno continuis imbris auctus Tiberis plana urbis stagnaverat; relabentem secuta est aedificiorum et hominum strages. igitur censuit Asinius Gallus ut libri Sibyllini adirentur. renuit Tiberius, perinde divina humanaque obtegens; sed remedium coercendi fluminis Ateio Capitoni et L. Arruntio mandatum.

(*Ann.* 1.76.1)

(In the same year the Tiber, increased by continuous rains, had covered the flat areas of the city with floodwater; as it withdrew, there followed the destruction of buildings and people. Therefore Asinius Gallus recommended that the Sibylline books should be approached. Tiberius refused, covering up divine affairs just the same as he did human ones; but the task of finding a means of restraining the river within its bounds was assigned to Ateius Capito and L. Arruntius.)

While Tacitus does not explicitly describe this flood as a *prodigium*,¹ several features of his description hint that Tacitus wants the reader to interpret this flood as ominous (as the senator Asinius Gallus does), or at least consider the

¹ On this question, see §0.2, and §6.5, p. 270.

possibility that it should be so interpreted. Floods were traditionally interpreted as prodigies, and Tacitus' language implicitly places this flood in the same traditional category by recalling how Livy reports prodigious occurrences in general and prodigious floods specifically.² Tacitus uses the same temporal label (*eodem anno*, "in the same year") with which Livy often introduces prodigy lists when he clusters them at year-ends, signifying that he has reported them out of chronological sequence.³ In particular, Tacitus' use of the verb *adire* ("approach") to describe the proposed consultation of the Sibylline books in response to the flood is the expression Livy generally uses for the practice⁴ (e.g. Livy 39.5.5 *horum prodigiorum causa decemviri libros adire iussi*, "because of these prodigies, the decemvirs were ordered to approach the books"). Thus, while Tacitus does not explicitly say that the floods of AD 15 are ominous,⁵ his language seems to suggest to the reader that they are similar to those to which the Romans of the past had responded as prodigies.

Yet while Tacitus' choice of words hints that this Tiber flood is one in a long line of traditional prodigies, he also provides clues that the world in which this flood occurs is very different from the world of Livy. A reader seeking the cause of what Tacitus implies is divine anger against Rome would not have far to look: the *delatores'* recent attempts to convict Faianius and Rubrius on trumped-up religious charges (*Ann.* 1.73) might well be enough to merit the wrath of the gods, especially since Tacitus identifies their trials as the beginning of an "extremely serious destruction" (*gravissimum exitium*) afflicting the state.⁶ Immediately before describing the flood, Tacitus also chronicles further accusations of *delatores* against Granius Marcellus (1.74–5), showing that Faianius and Rubrius' trials were not isolated incidents. In Nero's principate, Tacitus will explicitly connect such convictions by *delatores*, and the subsequent executions of the plaintiffs, with the wrath of the gods (16.16.2); but he already implies the connection here near the beginning of Tiberius' principate, chosen as the starting point of his enquiry into the Julio-Claudian past. While ominous floods are not new in Roman religious memory, the Tiber flood of AD 15 comes at a moment when society has begun to change for the worse in new ways.

Tiberius works outside the traditional procedures in the way he responds to the flood; this not only sheds light on the nature of the relationship between

² For Tiber floods viewed as prodigies, see Pliny *NH* 3.55; Krauss 1930, 61–2; Goodyear 1981, 171; Aldrete 2007, 219–21. For Tacitus' allusions to Livy in this passage, see Shannon 2018.

³ Ginsburg 1981, 33–4; Levene 1993, 35–6. Tacitus follows Livy's "year-end" strategy by placing nearly all his reports of prodigies at or near the ends of narrative years. For 1.76–81 as a cluster of annalistic material, see Wille 1983, 376–7.

⁴ Oakley 2005b, 341.

⁵ Compare Tacitus' explicit assertion that Tiber floods of AD 69 were prodigious (cf. *Hist.* 1.86.2); see Damon 2003, 273–4, 278–9; Shannon 2018.

⁶ See further §1.5, p. 39. On the *delatores*, see Powell 2010.

Senate and emperor, a major theme of the Tiberian hexad, but also provides insight into Tiberius' failures at religious interpretation. According to Republican tradition, it was the Senate's job to decide whether an ominous event reported to it had really occurred and, if so, whether it was of a type that required religious remedy; if the prodigy was found to be genuine, it was also the Senate's job to mandate the quindecimvirs to consult the Sibylline books to determine the proper remedy.⁷ In this case, it is not in doubt that a flood of the Tiber has occurred, and there is ample precedent for considering floods as prodigies worthy of expiation. Indeed, Asinius Gallus considers the flood worrisome enough to warrant the Senate's attention;⁸ as a quindecimvir, he would have been responsible for consulting the Sibylline books.⁹ But Tiberius overrules Gallus' expert advice and refuses to let traditional procedure be followed. Goodyear considers Tacitus' charge of dissimulation too harsh, and some commentators attribute Tiberius' reluctance to consult the Sibylline books to the fatalistic character of a man convinced that all prophecies were bound to come true, and hence reluctant to investigate them lest he should find dire predictions about himself.¹⁰ But Tacitus' claim about Tiberius' motives rings true with his usual practice of silencing debate on religious issues, a strong feature (as we shall see) of Tacitus' narrative throughout *Annals* 1–2. By refusing to allow consultation of the Sibylline books, Tiberius deprives the Senate of its traditional role as the body which determines when the books should be consulted, casting himself as the only source of religious authority.¹¹ The passage's Livian character only serves to underscore Tiberius' departure from tradition: although the language is traditional, the Senate's lack of freedom to act is certainly not. Only the emperor may now decide when something is a religious problem, and once he has decided that the flood is not, there is no more discussion.

Furthermore, Tacitus strongly implies that Tiberius has interpreted this case incorrectly. Tiberius is forcing a deviation from how the prodigy-expiation system is traditionally supposed to work, leaving open the possibility that divine displeasure may result from this lapse. Tacitus' use of traditional language implies that the Tiber flood *should* be considered a prodigy, in the traditional manner. This implicitly raises the possibility that Tiberius' refusal

⁷ Potter 1994, 149–51; Oakley 1998, 251; Davies 2004, 73–8; Santangelo 2013, 128–9. For an example of a prodigy rejected by the Senate, see Livy 43.13.6, with Levene 1993, 115–16; Briscoe 2012, 431.

⁸ I doubt Levick's 1976, 105 suggestion that "Gallus' proposal was sarcastic." Tacitus' deprecatory comment on Tiberius as *divina... obtegens* would be odd if the suggestion that the floods were prodigious were supposed to be patently ridiculous.

⁹ Rüpke 2008, 547–8. Asinius' priesthood is also attested outside Tacitus (*ILS* 5050 l. 150).

¹⁰ Goodyear 1981, 171; see also Furneaux 1896, 280; Maggi 1946, 165–6; Koestermann 1963, 247.

¹¹ Cf. Davies 2004, 190–1, who also notes that there may be a personal element to the conflict between Tiberius and Gallus (cf. 1.12–13).

to consider it as such could have consequences for Rome in the future. Since Tiberius overrules the Senate, no legitimate judgment is able to be made about the flood; if the flood *was* really a warning from the gods, the traditional procedure that would allow that warning to be recognized and acted upon cannot be followed. Thus, Tiberius' autocratic decision-making has the potential to upset the relationship between Rome and the gods even further. If we are to see a connection between the flood and the *gravissimum exitium* of treason trials, for which Tacitus partly blames Tiberius (*Ann.* 1.73.1), then the emperor is twice guilty when it comes to the Tiber flood: he had a hand in the divine displeasure that may have caused it, and he fails to recognize that divine displeasure once it has been aroused. The recognition and expiation of *prodigia*, a crucial element of Roman cultic memory, is closely intertwined with Tiberius' failings as a ruler.

Yet despite Tiberius' ruling that the floods are not prodigious, he also fails to solve the problem by purely practical means. The proposal to divert the Tiber provokes objections from Italian townspeople: some of the proposed alterations will cause destructive flooding in other parts of the Italian countryside (*Ann.* 1.79.1–3), but some of their objections relate to cult:

optume rebus mortalium consuluisse naturam, quae sua ora fluminibus, suos cursus, utque originem, ita finis dederit; spectandas etiam religiones sociorum, qui sacra et lucos et aras patriis amnibus dicaverint; quin ipsum Tiberim nolle prorsus accolis fluviis orbatum minore gloria fluere. seu preces coloniarum seu difficultas operum sive superstitio valuit, ut in sententiam Pisonis concederet<ur>, qui nil mutandum censuerat. (1.79.3–4)

(Nature, they said, had looked after mortals' affairs excellently, since she had given to rivers their mouths, their courses, their beginning as well as their boundaries; consideration should also be given to the *religiones* of the allies, who had dedicated sacred rites, groves, and altars to the rivers of their fatherland; indeed, the Tiber himself would certainly not wish to flow with less glory by being deprived of his neighbor-rivers. Either the settlements' pleas, or the difficulty of the works, or *superstitio* was effective, with the result that there was a concession to the opinion of Piso, who had recommended that nothing must be changed.)

The religious practices of the Italian towns will also be affected, since the planned diversions of rivers will apparently make it difficult for them to carry out the traditional rituals (*religiones*) for their local river gods.¹² The Italians also imply there is a risk of offending the divine Tiber by removing its tributaries.¹³ On the face of it, this is not a bad argument, given the religious importance of

¹² For this meaning of *religiones*, see *OLD* s.v. *religio* 8b; Grodzynski 1974, 46; Kahlos 2007, 391.

¹³ The Tiber is a divine guarantor of Roman success at Virg. *Aen.* 8.36–65. See also Benario 1978.

river gods and water in Rome and throughout Italy.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Tacitus labels their objections as *superstitio*. The term has pejorative connotations and indicates “excessive forms of behavior” or “excessive commitment to the gods,” and refers to religious practices outside the realm of the elite-dominated Roman state cult.¹⁵ With this term, Tacitus suggests that the Italians’ fears are “a little excessive,”¹⁶ and implies that they do not understand the situation properly. Much like the soldiers in the Pannonian mutiny who are filled with *superstitio* and give way to irrational fears during an eclipse (1.28.2), these rural Italians become overly concerned with their river gods at the expense of rationality and practicality.¹⁷ The proper, non-*superstitio*-influenced way to interpret the flood would have been to recognize it as a prodigy and expiate it according to the traditional apparatus of the state cult, an interpretation Tiberius has refused. The Italians, in their concern for their river gods, advance an alternative interpretation that is irrational, excessive, and not state-sanctioned, as Tacitus implies by using *superstitio* to describe it.

In this episode, then, Tiberius fails either to provide proper religious guidance, or to prevent problematic religious interpretations. Because of this, Roman religious memory (as embodied in the traditional prodigy-expiation system) is neglected, and *superstitio* springs up unchecked in its place. This toxic combination is also infused with the tincture of ineffectiveness: Tiberius comes across as inactive, since in the end no steps whatsoever are taken against the flood. Tiberius (if he was present at the Senate’s meeting) does not react to this reversal of his recommendation. Perhaps he would have preferred to go ahead with the works, but thought it better to tread carefully in view of the Senate’s opposition.¹⁸ Perhaps he found the colonists’ religious arguments against the works valid, but if so, he does not comment on this directly. Just as Tiberius closed off debate by refusing to interpret the flood as a supernatural event, this time he allows inactivity through silence.

It seems that Tacitus deliberately chose to depict these events so as to highlight Tiberius’ failings. Dio frames his account of the same episode (57.14.7–8) differently by reporting the flood in the context of other occurrences

¹⁴ See Edlund-Berry 2006.

¹⁵ Beard et al. 1998, i.217. Cf. Salzman 1987, 173–4; Gordon 2008, 73–4. By the early second century AD, it was also used as a derogatory term for the religious beliefs and practices of non-Roman peoples, and Tacitus frequently uses *superstitio* in this sense: see Grodzynski 1974, 47–8; Scheid 1985, 23–4; Beard et al. 1998, i.221–2; Kahlos 2007, 394. On Tacitus’ usage of the term in the *Histories*, see Shannon 2014, 283–92.

¹⁶ Scheid 1985, 22.

¹⁷ On the Pannonian eclipse, see §2.2, pp. 72–3. Irrational interpretations of natural phenomena are often characteristic of lower-class groups, as opposed to the superior, natural-scientific explanations of the educated aristocracy; see Grodzynski 1974, 53; Ronca 1992, 55; Gordon 2008, 74; Santangelo 2013, 41.

¹⁸ Koestermann 1963, 254; Seager 1972, 129. The emperor had the right to speak at any point in senatorial proceedings; disagreeing with him was rare (Talbert 1984, 163–74).

(earthquakes, lightning) generally interpreted as omens. Dio's Tiberius also privileges a practical solution over a religious one, thereby coming across as a more dynamic ruler than in Tacitus' account: after Tiberius forms a committee to oversee the river (note Dio's active προσέταξεν, compared with Tacitus' passive *mandatum*), Dio's narration stops, ending on a high note of Imperial activity. Moreover, the episode does not take place during a meeting of the Senate, so there is no debate for Tiberius to obstruct, no traditional consultation of the Sibylline books for him to disallow, and no Italian *superstitio* for him to take (erroneously) into account. In Dio's account, Tiberius' decision not to interpret these occurrences as prodigies could be viewed negatively, since ignoring omens arouses the gods' wrath (*ira deum*). But Dio also leaves out the element of *superstitio*, the policing of problematic religious interpretations at which Tacitus' Tiberius fails so spectacularly. Dio's version does not have the same implications for how religious concerns affect (and are affected by) the dynamics of the relationship between Tiberius and the Senate. Tacitus' Tiberius is both more autocratic and less conscientious about following religious traditions. As we shall see, the interplay between these two characteristics inhibits his ability to provide religious guidance for his subjects.

The episode of the Tiber flood is in many ways paradigmatic for how we should view Tiberius' relationship with Roman cultic memory: with a diktat from on high, Tiberius silences the interpretation of the flood that would have been traditional (as a prodigy that must be expiated), leaving the way open for *superstitio*, which prevents the problem from being addressed on a practical level. This intertwining of the emperor's religious failings and his subjects' problematic religious interpretations (which he does too little to counter) will be a major feature of Tiberius' principate: it is not just Tiberius himself who gets things wrong, and his failure to enforce religious norms correctly is no less destructive than the attitudes that prevail in society at large. Neither Tiberius nor his subjects seem to have a solid understanding of Roman religious memory and how best to preserve it.

1.2 FUNERAL, APOTHEOSIS, AND *RECUSATIO*

But where does this problem start? Were the Roman people already losing sight of religious tradition and falling into problematic practices before Tiberius became *princeps*, or is he personally responsible for the decay of Roman religious memory? Tacitus, true to fashion, does not answer this question directly; nevertheless, it is clear from the way he tells the story of early Julio-Claudian history that the problem does not simply begin with Tiberius. Strictly speaking, the *Annals* themselves do not begin with Tiberius, but rather, with "a few things about Augustus, and his final stages" (*Ann.* 1.1.3 *pauca de*

Augusto et extrema). Tiberius is the first emperor whose reign is narrated in any detail, emphasizing that the story Tacitus wishes to tell in the *Annals* is one of dynastic succession within a hereditary monarchy.¹⁹

There is much that Tiberius will inherit along with the position of *princeps*. The end of Augustus' principate casts its shadow over Tiberius' accession, implying that the problems that Tacitus will chronicle in the *Annals* are not simply Tiberius' fault, but rather, arose from a system that existed before he became emperor. This is especially true from the point of view of cultic memory, for Tiberius' accession is accompanied by the consecration of Augustus as a god: the leader of the political regime changes, and in the same moment, the pantheon is expanded to include the previous leader. Deification is a particularly thorny issue that proves difficult to navigate for both Tacitus' Romans (particularly the Senate) and the reader. As Tacitus portrays it, *divus Augustus* has profound and far-reaching influence upon religious memory under Tiberius; the associated religious problems therefore do not come about because of Tiberius' accession specifically, but are a product of the Imperial system in general.

In reality, Augustus' deification was probably accepted without difficulty even if there may have been individuals who opposed enrolling men among the gods.²⁰ Yet in the world of the *Annals*, Tacitus presents Augustus' deification in such a way that the reader hears only critical voices, thereby bringing into the foreground a cynical view of deification as being connected primarily with attempts to consolidate political power regardless of its appropriateness according to traditional religious norms. The first reference to Augustus' deification comes from his critics, censuring his apparent desire for worship: "Nothing was left for honors for the gods, since he wished himself to be worshipped with temples and divinities' image by *flamines* and priests" (*Ann.* 1.10.6 *nihil deorum honoribus relictum, cum se templis et effigie numinum per flamines et sacerdotes coli vellet*). As Gradel has convincingly argued, what Augustus' critics accuse him of wanting is nothing other than an official decree of deification after his death at the hands of the state: *flamines* and *sacerdotes* must refer to the priestly apparatus of the official state cult that would be established only after a posthumous deification, and *templum* and *effigies* would therefore also have to refer to a state-financed temple and cult statue.²¹ These physical elements would permanently build *divus Augustus* into the physical fabric of Rome, becoming a site to which future worshippers through the centuries would regularly return to make dedications; through this material continuity, Roman temples functioned as important repositories

¹⁹ On Tacitus' decision to begin the *Annals* with Augustus' death and Tiberius' succession, see Syme 1958, 368–74; O'Gorman 1995, esp. pp. 101–14. For the centrality of dynastic concerns, see Kraus 2009, 102–3; Klaassen 2014, 158–9.

²⁰ Taylor 1931, 232; Price 1984, 88; Beard et al. 1998, i.208.

²¹ Gradel 2002, 276–9.

of religious memory.²² A flamine of Augustus would similarly ensure that the memory of the *divus* remained alive in Roman religious life, since these priests would be mandated to perform regular rituals for Augustus, presumably (like other priests) at specific moments in the Roman calendar. The choice of a *flamen* particularly underlines this notion of longevity and living cultic memory: the first *flamen* dated back to the reign of Numa as “a continuously present priest” (Livy 1.20.2 *adsiduum sacerdotem*), and the *flamen Dialis* (the *flamen* about whom the most is known) was said to be “celebrating every day” (Gellius NA 10.15.16 *cotidie feriat*). In other words, what Augustus wanted (or at least what his critics *implied* he wanted) when he aimed at deification was nothing less than to be inscribed forever into the cultic memory of the Roman state.

Previous commentators have misunderstood the nature of the criticism and claimed that these detractors are somehow being unfair; they highlight the worship of Augustus in communities outside Rome or in private contexts within Italy, seen as less problematic than official state deification, and emphasize Augustus’ refusal of state cult during his lifetime.²³ Those non-state-sanctioned varieties of emperor cult were clearly in existence and would have been known to both Tacitus’ readership and the characters in *Annals* 1.9–10 alive at the time of Augustus’ death. For example, Tiberius later refers to Augustus’ temple at Pergamum, famous as a site of worship within Augustus’ own lifetime,²⁴ as a “pleasing example” (4.37.3 *placitum . . . exemplum*), implying that he not only expected the temple to be well known to his audience, but also thought it would be relatively uncontroversial. Tacitus could have included such examples of non-state-sanctioned worship of Augustus in these chapters of the *Annals*; placed in the mouth of Augustus’ supporters, examples like that of the temple at Pergamum could have been construed as evidence that Augustus deserved to be deified by the state after his death, since steps had already been taken to worship him as a god during his lifetime, spontaneously and at the request of Augustus’ subjects throughout the empire, rather than at the behest of the emperor himself.

An official state cult of Augustus could, then, have been made to look like a posthumous rubber-stamping of the divinity that had been becoming apparent throughout Augustus’ life. Yet by allowing only Augustus’ critics to refer to the deification, and by mentioning specific components of state worship, Tacitus implies that Augustus may have deliberately aimed at being honored

²² See §0.3, p. 18. For temples as physical repositories of cultic (and cultural) memory in the *Annals*, see §7.6, p. 320, and Shannon 2012, 751–4, 759–60.

²³ e.g. Koestermann 1963, 103; Goodyear 1972, 166.

²⁴ See Hänlein-Schäfer 1985, 166–8 for literary, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence for the temple.

as an official state god after his death.²⁵ It is striking that we are not given a pro-apotheosis point of view: Tacitus' report of the pro-Augustans' opinions (*Ann.* 1.9.3–5) contains no reference to deification. While there was a positive spin to be put on Augustus' involvement in the civil wars after Julius Caesar's death and the political settlement that followed, Tacitus does not allow the same to be true of state-sponsored deification. Presumably some would have agreed that Augustus should become a *divus* after his death,²⁶ but Tacitus does not allow that viewpoint any space in the *Annals*. With that omission, Tacitus implies that Augustus' desire for divinity was only to be viewed in a negative light, as part of Augustus' grasping after unprecedented power by dubious means. For, by juxtaposing remarks about deification with the preceding litany of Augustus' misdeeds in the mouths of the critics, Tacitus draws a pointed and possibly ironic contrast between Augustus' behavior and his deification: "It is of such a man that a god is made!"²⁷ Augustus' critics may wish to insinuate that his blood-soaked rise to sole ruler of the Roman Empire makes him in some way unworthy of being a god.

A similar argument is made in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* ("a prime source for imperial apotheosis"²⁸) about why Claudius is unworthy of deification: in a council of the gods, *divus Augustus* argues that Claudius should not be allowed to become a god because of the large number of people (especially members of his own family) for whose murders he has been responsible (*Sen. Apocol.* 11.5). Furthermore, he argues that admitting Claudius to the pantheon will devalue what it is to be a god and will lower humans' opinions of the "regular" gods who chose to admit him to their number: "Who would worship *him* as a god? Who would believe in him? While you make such men into gods, no one will believe that *you* are gods" (*Sen. Apocol.* 11.4 *hunc deum quis colet? quis credet? dum tales deos facitis, nemo vos deos esse credet*). This is strikingly similar to the assertion of the *Annals'* Augustan critics that Augustus' appropriation of the traditional apparatus of cult worship has had the effect of cheapening the traditional means available to honor the "real" gods. The notion, then, that some individuals could be thought unworthy of deification, and that making them into gods would somehow devalue the cultural vocabulary (priests, temples) with which the gods were usually honored, was, if not necessarily a widely held opinion, at least a possible alternative to enthusiastic acceptance of deification. Tacitus highlights the presence of this viewpoint in early Tiberian Rome: those who disliked the fact that Augustus was becoming a god, Tacitus implies, had good reasons for that opinion. It was

²⁵ Cf. Gradel 2002, 279.

²⁶ For the idea that Augustus deserved divinity because of his conduct in life, cf. *Sen. Clem.* 1.10.3.

²⁷ Wankenne 1977, 332 ("C'est d'un tel homme qu'on fait un dieu!").

²⁸ Gradel 2002, 325.

perfectly possible to say that Augustus deserved worship for his good behavior; Tacitus instead chooses to imply the opposite.

This is not to say that Tacitus necessarily thought that Augustus' critics had the right idea about his deification. Indeed, because this negative view of deification comes from such biased interpreters within the text, the reader is left uncertain whether to believe it.²⁹ Yet when Tacitus moves abruptly from these anti-Augustan sentiments into a matter-of-fact report of the actual deification given in his own authorial voice (*Ann.* 1.10.8), the criticisms of Augustus' detractors still ring in the reader's ear, and the *caelestes religiones* are viewed in the context of an attitude that sees deification only as something that demeans the honors available to the "real" gods, and not as an appropriate way to commemorate Augustus.

Notably, however, this criticism does not actually prevent Augustus from being made a god. Tacitus reports no debate in the Senate about whether Augustus should be deified; he states simply that the deification went ahead. When it comes time to admit Augustus to the pantheon of official gods in the Roman state cult, Tacitus silences the critical voices who had complained about the worship of Augustus at *Ann.* 1.10.6. Furthermore, distinctions between different groups of senators, some of whom must have agreed with the deification of Augustus and some of whom Tacitus tells us did not, are erased. Tacitus uses passive verbs to describe both Augustus' critics (1.10.1 *dicebatur*) and the Senate's conferral of divine honors (1.10.8 *decernuntur*); since no agent is specified in either case, the reader is left to speculate how much overlap there was between the people who criticized the worship of Augustus and the senators who voted for his deification.³⁰ Although talk against Augustus' deification is clearly in the air after his death, it does not affect the Senate's ultimate decision, even if some of its members were participants in such criticism (just as the criticisms of Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis* did not make Claudius any less a *divus*).³¹ Those critics, for whatever reason, do not voice their opinions when the actual vote about deification is taken, and the reader can only speculate about why those dissenting voices have fallen silent.

At least some people in Tacitus' Senate, then, may be hiding their true opinions about Augustus' deification: "Hypocrisy is not a preserve of the emperor alone; nor is inconsistency."³² While we should not minimize the number of senators (perhaps even the majority) who evidently found Augustus' deification thoroughly unproblematic, the hypocrisy of the dissenters who

²⁹ Cf. Pelling 2010, 374.

³⁰ The doubtfulness is magnified by the shifting between senatorial procedure and popular talk (probably outside the Senate, but not necessarily excluding senators as participants) that Tacitus introduces into the sequence *Ann.* 1.8–10: 1.8.1–5 (in the Senate), 1.8.6 (apparently outside the Senate), 1.9.1–10.7 *quaesivisse* (apparently outside the Senate), 1.10.7 *etenim... exprobraret* (a digression describing a discussion which took place in the Senate during the Augustan period), 1.10.8 (again in the Senate meeting of AD 15) (A. J. Woodman, *per litteras*).

³¹ Cf. Gradel 2002, 328–9.

³² Pelling 2010, 369.

grumbled in private but did not publicly raise their concerns sets Tacitus' tone for interactions between Senate and emperor on religious questions, particularly involving emperor worship. The Senate's tendency to disingenuousness becomes more pronounced as the *Annals* progress, but it is already apparent early in *Annals* 1. The relationship is characterized by dissimulation on Tiberius' side, and flattery on the Senate's: Tiberius will not explicitly ask for what he wants, while the senators repeatedly tell the emperor what they believe he wants to hear.

The deification of Augustus is the first step in this uneasy dance between Tiberius and the Senate, as they negotiate the terms of the new *princeps*' power.

ceterum sepultura more perfecta templum et caelestes religiones decernuntur. versae inde ad Tiberium preces. et ille varie disserebat de magnitudine imperii, sua modestia. solam divi Augusti mentem tantae molis capacem: se in partem curarum ab illo vocatum experiendo didicisse, quam arduum, quam subiectum fortunae regendi cuncta onus. (*Ann.* 1.10.8–11.1)

(But after the burial was completed according to custom, a temple and heavenly rites were decreed. Then prayers were turned toward Tiberius. And he talked variously of the magnitude of command and his own modesty. Only the mind of the divine Augustus, he said, was capable of so great a responsibility: he, after being summoned by him to share his concerns, had learned by experience how arduous and how subject to fortune is the burden of ruling everything.)

Immediately, worship of *divus Augustus* blurs into worshipful treatment of his living successor Tiberius. From practically the first moment of his reign, the Senate places itself in a subservient role, as if Tiberius were a god: as Woodman notes, “The religious connotations of . . . *preces* are activated by its juxtaposition with *templum et caelestes religiones*: the senators turn . . . from a dead god to a living.”³³ Tiberius' objection to these *preces* seems similarly disingenuous. The precedent of the dead god Augustus looms large in the relationship between the Senate and Tiberius. Empire, says Tiberius, is an “excessive burden only Augustus (just declared to be *divus* and hence officially rated as exceptional) could sustain alone.”³⁴ This could be a straightforward display of piety and deference, but the doubt about Augustus' deification that Tacitus has recently sown (*Ann.* 1.10.6) makes us wonder how genuine these sentiments are. Likewise, Tiberius' reference to the vagaries of fortune could indicate a humble understanding of a *princeps*' shaky position in the cosmos,³⁵ or the statement could be calculated merely to *appear* humble.

The Senate responds to Tiberius' ambiguity with further gestures of worship: “But the fathers, whose only fear was that they seemed to understand, broke out into complaints, tears, vows; they stretched their hands to the gods,

³³ Woodman 1998, 61. See also Corbeill 2004, 164.

³⁴ Griffin 1995, 40.

³⁵ For *fortuna* as “agent of change” of emperors or regimes, see Matthews 2011, 134–6; on Imperial *fortuna*, Matthews 2011, 123–5.

to the image of Augustus, to the knees of Tiberius himself" (*Ann.* 1.11.3 *at patres, quibus unus metus si intellegere viderentur, in questus lacrimas vota effundi; ad deos, ad effigiem Augusti, ad genua ipsius manus tendere*). *Quibus unus metus si intellegere viderentur*, a difficult phrase, on Woodman's interpretation indicates that the senators fear what they think is a real refusal of power ("whose one dread was that they seemed [to themselves] to understand").³⁶ To convince Tiberius to change his mind, they turn to prayers (*vota*), addressing first the gods and then *divus Augustus*, sliding seamlessly into gestures of supplication directed at Tiberius himself.³⁷ The scene shows the Senate's "abject subservience to, and complete dependence on, the *princeps*,"³⁸ underscored by religious language. This implies that flattery made the Senate rush to declare Augustus divine despite his detractors' objections, and the Senate's dependence on Tiberius makes them invoke the dubiously deified Augustus as they beg him to reconsider.

But the phrase could also indicate that the senators understand Tiberius' *recusatio* is all a ploy but do not want him to realize that they know this ("whose one dread was that they seemed [to Tiberius] to understand"). On this interpretation, their prayers to Augustus and supplication to his son become an act of deception. *Ann.* 1.10 is again in the background: if some of the nameless detractors of Augustus are among the senators in *Ann.* 1.11, those who once criticized him for aiming at divinity would now be stretching out their hands to his statue in prayer. Whether or not they agreed with Augustus' deification, Tiberius' appeal to the *divus*' precedent forces the terms of the debate to include him now, and the extension of *preces* and *vota* to Tiberius are also a direct consequence, intentional or not, of his simulated humility. Imperial dissimulation may be a relic of Augustus, too, as is implied by the juxtaposition of Tiberius' refusal of power with the criticisms of Augustus in the preceding chapter, filled with words emphasizing deceit.³⁹ The image is of a pattern of deceptive Imperial behavior older than Tiberius, to which the Senate now must reply in kind.

Neither the Senate nor Tiberius has a clear conception of how Augustus' divinity should affect attitudes to his successor. Both sides speak in coded language and refuse to take a stand, while the entire Senate slides quickly into

³⁶ Woodman 1998, 48–9.

³⁷ Naiden 2006, 6–7 notes the blurred distinction between prayer and supplication: extending the hands (Naiden 2006, 51) and claspings the knees of the *supplicandus* (Naiden 2006, 44–6) are supplicatory gestures. For supplication at an emperor's statue, cf. Naiden 2006, 252–3 and *Ann.* 3.36.

³⁸ Woodman 1998, 49.

³⁹ *Obtentui, simulatam* (1.10.1); *machinator doli Caesar* (10.2); *sed Pompeium imagine pacis, sed Lepidum specie amicitiae deceptos* (10.3); *inlectum, subdolae* (10.3). For similar "layers of deceit and dissimulation behind [Tiberius'] reluctance to assume office" (cf. 1.7.3), see Bartsch 1994, 164.

treatment of Tiberius almost as a living god. Tacitus does not say who is to blame for this state of affairs. Some responsibility lies with the Senate: if any of its members disagreed with Augustus' deification, they chose to bury these criticisms behind so opaque a screen of dissimulation as to actually pray to his statue. Certainly some senators, such as Asinius Gallus, Arruntius, and Messala, choose the path of outright flattery by proposing unusual honorific elements for Augustus' funeral (*Ann.* 1.8.3–4). But Tiberius is culpable, too: the Senate is forced into this behavior while attempting to respond to the emperor's ambiguous cues about how he would like to be treated. Tiberius' refusal explicitly to define his own relationship to *divus Augustus* prefigures his obfuscatory silence in the face of religious arguments against curtailing the flooding Tiber toward the end of *Ann.* 1. Tiberius might have made a stronger stand at this crucial moment in the transfer of power: explicitly commanding the senators not to address *preces*, *vota*, and supplicatory gestures to him could have stopped flattery in its tracks.

But Tiberius is probably not the start of the problem; Tacitus indicates he had inherited an example of dissimulation from his predecessor, and perhaps it was not easy to abandon the dishonesty that Tacitus' Augustan critics imply had already become the status quo for the *princeps*. Tiberius inherits an already broken system of religious discourse: the relationship between emperor and Senate is a carefully calculated dance of dissimulation that will prove destructive to Roman cultic memory over the course of the *Annals*. It is crucial that Tacitus leaves so many questions unanswered about the relationship of the emperors to the divine: whether Augustus wished to be worshipped as a god, whether Tiberius wishes to be treated as a god, how the Senate should behave towards him. The air is extremely murky from the very beginning of the *Annals*; by the time Tiberius takes over, it already appears to be a foregone conclusion that emperors are godlike and deserve treatment as such. By beginning the *Annals* with deification and succession, Tacitus emphasizes that this is simply a truth of the principate. What this truth means for political life in Rome will take the rest of the *Annals* to explicate.

1.3 THE USE AND ABUSE OF *DIVUS AUGUSTUS*: THE *MAIESTAS* DISEASE

Perhaps no single aspect of Tiberian political life shows how *divus Augustus* affects the relationship between Tiberius and the Senate more clearly than *maiestas* trials,⁴⁰ which come into Tacitus' field of vision near the end of his

⁴⁰ The bibliography on the history of *maiestas* in Roman law is vast; for a recent, lucid summary of *maiestas* before Tiberius (with a special focus on Augustus), see Peachin 2015.

narrative of AD 15, shortly before the account of the Tiber floods with which this chapter began. Tacitus introduces the section on *maiestas* with another strange dance between Tiberius and his subjects that is very similar to the pantomime of offering and refusing that characterized *Ann.* 1.11: Tiberius refuses the title *pater patriae* and an oath sworn to his *acta*. The reasons Tiberius gives appear to show recognition of his mortality and the slipperiness of fortune shared by all members of the human race:⁴¹

nomen patris patriae Tiberius a populo saepius ingestum repudiavit; neque in acta sua iurari, quamquam censente senatu, permisit, cuncta mortalium incerta, quantoque plus adeptus foret, tanto se magis in lubrico dict<it>ans. non tamen ideo faciebat fidem civilis animi; nam legem maiestatis reduxerat. (1.72.1–2)

(The title *pater patriae*, thrust upon him rather often by the people, Tiberius refused; nor did he allow anyone to swear obedience to his acts, although the Senate decreed it—repeatedly saying that everything for mortals was uncertain, and that he was more in a hazardous position the more he acquired. Nevertheless, he did not thereby create belief in his citizenlike spirit: for he had brought back the law of *maiestas*.)

Tiberius' assertion of mortality strikes a very different chord from the *preces* and worshipful gestures of *Ann.* 1.11.1, but it is difficult to assess his sincerity. Perhaps he does not really believe he is on a level with other mortals, but must say so to appear humble; or perhaps he does actually believe it, but is forced to repeat it to the point that it *sounds* insincere⁴² because his subjects expect such a self-effacing attitude from their *princeps*. This apparent humility seems ineffective in stopping his subjects' flattery; *saepius ingestum* and the frequentative *dictitans* imply that this is a repeated dialogue between emperor and subjects. Certainly the dissimulative nature of relations between the emperor and his subjects that characterizes the principate has to some degree painted Tiberius into a corner: he would, we might assume, be criticized by both his subjects and Tacitus if he accepted the title *pater patriae* or allowed his subjects to swear to uphold his *acta*, but his resistance to such honors is repeatedly met with opposition. Yet it is really his "revival" of the *maiestas* law which ultimately gives the lie to his apparent *civilis animus*;⁴³ implicitly, the

⁴¹ For the sentiment, cf. *Ann.* 3.6.3 (on which see §3.2, pp. 126–7).

⁴² Strocchio 2001, 55 n. 93 notes that the word *dictitans* "contributes to removing credibility from the emperor's words" (*contribuisce . . . a togliere credibilità alle parole dell'imperatore*).

⁴³ Strocchio 2001, 55–6. The question of a "revival" of the *maiestas* law is vexed, since there is no indication that it had ever "lapsed;" it had been applied as recently as AD 12 (Peachin 2015, 530 even suggests a possible case in AD 13). Actual suspensions of the *lex maiestatis* are alleged under later emperors (e.g. Nerva), but Brunt 1984 considers it "*a priori* implausible" that any emperor would suspend a law punishing treason (469), and that Tacitus was "technically incorrect" to say that Tiberius revived it (472). Probably what Tiberius did was fail to curb abuses under the law, which Tacitus rounds up to a "revival." For discussion of the problem, see also Bauman 1974, 221–3; Goodyear 1981, 149–50.

best thing for Tiberius to have done would have been both to refuse the title *and* not to prosecute cases under the *maiestas* law. This places the blame more squarely on the emperor's side than in the discussion about Augustus' deification: Tiberius may profess to be cognizant of his place in the cosmos, but presumably he would not have had such an attitude to the *maiestas* law if he truly believed himself to be on a level with other mortals.

In the *maiestas* trials of the Tiberian *Annals*, the question of the divine or mortal status of members of the Imperial family proves to be vitally important: the trials become a key forum for exploring the question of how emperors are to be treated. The first *maiestas* trials of Tiberius' reign, against equestrians Faianius⁴⁴ and Rubrius, show Tiberius and his subjects continuing to work out *divus Augustus*' position in the state. All of the charges are perceived insults to the new god, and Tiberius must decide whether these are punishable impieties. Tacitus draws attention to his own purpose in describing the trials; though sordid, the accusations are important to relate as "test charges" for a type of trial that would become destructive to Rome:

Haud pigebit referre in Faianio et Rubrio, modicis equitibus Romanis, praetemptata crimina, ut quibus initiis quanta Tiberii arte gravissimum exitium inrepperit, dein repressum sit, postremo arserit cunctaque corripuerit, noscatur.

(*Ann.* 1.73.1)

(It will not be distasteful to relate the accusations that were tested out against Faianius and Rubrius, Roman equestrians of moderate station, so that it may be recognized from what beginnings, and with what great skill on Tiberius' part, that extremely serious destruction crept in, then was suppressed, and finally flared up and seized hold of everything.)

Tacitus describes the threat in medical terms, as a disease afflicting the state.⁴⁵ This indicates that, although neither defendant is convicted, the trial represents a serious problem. The use of disease imagery represents an explicitly negative judgment on Tacitus' part: the historian lets his reader know that what follows is a prime example of how Tiberius' policies are deleterious to society.

It is therefore extremely significant that the memory of *divus Augustus* forms the basis of the accusations against Faianius and Rubrius: the *gravissimum exitium* of Tiberius' reign is closely linked with Romans' relationship with the newest god of their state pantheon. Faianius is charged with enrolling the mime actor Cassius, a man of dubious sexual history,⁴⁶ among his private

⁴⁴ His name is probably "Faianius" rather than the "Falanius" transmitted by the MS: see Bauman 1974, 221–3; Goodyear 1981, 149–50.

⁴⁵ Woodman 2010, 44–5; see also Walker 1952, 89–90; Goodyear 1981, 154.

⁴⁶ He is described as *corpore infamem*, probably an indication that he was the penetrated partner in sexual acts with men (Goodyear 1981, 155).

“Augustus-worshippers” (*cultores Augusti*),⁴⁷ and with selling a statue of the *divus* together with a garden. Rubrius is charged with breaking an oath sworn on Augustus’ *numen* (*Ann.* 1.73.3). The unnamed accusers in this case are not totally unreasonable in making religious accusations in the courts, yet their charges are not in keeping with the principles that usually governed such charges. In Roman law, certain forms of religious crime were legally actionable and punished by the state. *Sacrilegium* (theft of the gods’ property from sanctuaries) was viewed in the same light as *peculatus* (embezzlement of state property);⁴⁸ a good example is the case of Q. Pleminius, put on trial before the popular assembly in 204 BC for his role in the robbery of the temple of Proserpina at Locri (*Livy* 29.22.7).⁴⁹ Yet the “offenses” against *divus Augustus* that are alleged here do not fit the pattern of the wrongs against divinities committed by people like Pleminius. Instead, the accusations against Faianius and Rubrius seem like dubious attempts to entrap innocent men on trumped-up charges rather than serious and valid attempts to use the mechanisms offered by the Roman legal system to redress a real rupture in the *pax deorum* that might threaten the state’s well-being.⁵⁰

It is hard to see how the alleged deeds of Faianius and Rubrius can be seriously interpreted as threatening to the relationship between the gods and the Roman state. Faianius’ selling of a statue of a god is very different from stealing one from a sanctuary, and the change of ownership represents no loss to *divus Augustus*, since presumably the statue will still be given due honors by its next owner.⁵¹ Cassius the mime is explicitly described as a *cultor Augusti* in Faianius’ private house, not as a priest in the state-sponsored cult of Augustus, so his worthiness or unworthiness is of no concern to the state.⁵² And targeting Rubrius for swearing falsely by Augustus’ *numen* is also not in line with traditional practice. Roman law seems to have been reluctant to punish for perjury,⁵³ and punishment for blasphemy was thought best left to the gods themselves rather than to the Roman legal apparatus.⁵⁴ In making these charges, the accusers are overlooking traditional norms dictating how offenses

⁴⁷ See Gradel 2002, 111–12 for the worship of Augustus in private houses, which probably began within his lifetime.

⁴⁸ Mommsen 1899, 760–2.

⁴⁹ On Pleminius, see *Livy* 29.21.8, with Wells 2010, 232–6; Köster 2014. For the similar example of Q. Fulvius Flaccus, see Wells 2010, 236–9; Köster 2014, 326–7.

⁵⁰ Wells 2010, 230 notes that official government action was not taken against impiety unless the offense threatened the well-being of the entire state by upsetting the *pax deorum*; see also Scheid 1981, 152–3, 166–8. In Pleminius’ case, the Locrian ambassadors warn the Senate that failure to expiate Pleminius’ impiety could lead to disaster for the entire community (*Livy* 29.18.9), and *Livy* follows the report of Pleminius’ temple robbery with a prodigy list, indicating that it caused divine anger (Levene 1993, 72).

⁵¹ Clauss 1999, 415. See also Peachin 2015, 548, on the similar situation described in the Second Cyrene Edict.

⁵² See Clauss 1999, 414–15.

⁵³ Furneaux 1896, 276; Bauman 1974, 73; Price 1987, 80.

⁵⁴ Mommsen 1899, 580.

against the gods are to be punished. Tacitus does not tell us what motivates the accusers, but we can assume that they hope for either material gain, or special favor with the emperor, or both (like Caepio, the *delator* against whom Tacitus rails at *Ann.* 1.74).

In addition to being motivated by greed, the charges are also important for what they reveal about the accusers' conception of *maiestas* and how it relates to *divus Augustus*. The law was notoriously vague as to what counted as an offense against the *maiestas* of the Roman people or the emperor;⁵⁵ now that Augustus has been deified, the accusers assume that offenses to *divus Augustus* belong in that category even if they would not have been prosecuted if they had been directed at other, "regular" gods. Given the importance placed on Augustus' deification during Tiberius' succession, it is perhaps not unreasonable for these accusers to think that these charges might be the sort of thing Tiberius would welcome: in seizing upon these slights to Augustus' godhead, however trifling, the accusers may be able to claim that they are helping to construct a cultic memory of the new god by ensuring he gets the proper respect.⁵⁶ But in the process, they are putting Roman citizens in danger of paying very serious penalties (banishment or even death)⁵⁷ for fairly trivial "crimes." This problem goes back to Augustus himself: Tacitus states that during the Republic, "deeds were prosecuted, but words went unpunished" (*Ann.* 1.72.2 *facta arguebantur, dicta impune erant*), but that "Augustus was the first to carry out an investigation of slanderous books under the cover of that law" (1.72.3 *primus Augustus cognitionem de famosis libellis specie legis eius tractavit*).⁵⁸ In particular, the accusation against Rubrius, which belongs to the realm of *dicta* rather than *facta*, falls into the category of accusations Augustus might have welcomed under the heading of *maiestas*. By seizing upon speech acts and other "crimes" against *divus Augustus*, these accusers are arguably honoring the memory of Augustus, both by upholding his legal precedents and by policing his religious memory.

Tiberius' response to the accusations is ostensibly good, aimed at combating this use of *divus*-related charges to entrap his subjects: in a letter, he admonishes the consuls that "heaven had not been decreed to his father so that the honor could be turned to the destruction of citizens" (*Ann.* 1.73.3 *non ideo decretum patri suo caelum ut in perniciem civium is honor verteretur*). Tiberius' avowed wish to protect his subjects from legal persecution seems to be offered as proof that there were no ulterior motives in the deification of Augustus; that is, that the previous *princeps* was not deified for the purpose of tainting the interactions between the new one and his subjects. Tiberius' apparent lenience

⁵⁵ Rutledge 2001, 87–8.

⁵⁶ Cf. Clauss 1999, 415–6.

⁵⁷ On punishments for *maiestas*, see Levick 1979.

⁵⁸ See further Peachin 2015, 525–30, 538–40 on Augustan punishments of libellous writing and speech.

and moderation has even led some scholars to claim that Tacitus has exaggerated the gravity of the *maiestas* trials.⁵⁹ But there is more here than meets the eye. In defending Faianius, Tiberius vouches for Cassius' respectability by citing his participation in games Livia decreed for Augustus (1.73.3);⁶⁰ but Livia's (perhaps suspiciously) obfuscatory actions at Augustus' death (1.5.4) have certainly cast some doubt on her relationship with her dead husband, making her perhaps not the best exemplar of *pietas* towards the *divus*. Tiberius' assertion that a statue of Augustus is just like a statue of any other god (1.73.3 *nec contra religiones fieri, quod effigies eius, ut alia numinum simulacra, venditionibus hortorum et domuum accedant*, "Nor was it an action contrary to religious scruples for his image, like other representations of divinities, to be included in the sales of gardens and houses") in a way fulfils the worst fears of Augustus' detractors (1.10.6; note the repetition of *effigie numinum*), who looked forward with dread to the day when there would be no difference in the way Augustus and the other gods were honored. Furthermore, Tiberius' argumentation is worryingly nonspecific: as Bauman notes, Faianius is let off because "*this* mimist was not of bad character, *this* alienation of a statue was lawful, but on different facts a receivable charge might lie."⁶¹ Tiberius' concern with particulars does not follow logically from his general statement (*non ideo decretum patri suo caelum, ut in perniciem civium is honor verteretur*), and the court is left uncertain about how Tiberius views such charges: are insults to his deified predecessor *never* actionable? Or are they *usually* actionable, but not in this specific case?

Tiberius' comment on the charge of perjury comes closer to a clear, general statement on Augustus' status: "The oath (he said) should be considered just as if he had sworn falsely by Jupiter: injuries to the gods were the gods' concern" (*Ann. 1.73.4 ius iurandum perinde aestimandum quam si Iovem fefellisset: deorum iniurias dis curae*). Given Roman law's attitude to perjury and blasphemy, Tiberius' ruling seems in line with traditional legal practice. But the bon mot with which he dismisses the charge is troubling. Jupiter "was the supreme embodiment of Roman *maiestas*, and if he could not claim a criminal sanction for perjury then no one could,"⁶² but the mocking tone of the *sententia* gives the reference to Jupiter an irreverent quality. The tone of this closing aphorism arms us "against the attraction of the emperor's sensible comment, and the process becomes all the more vicious for seeming so innocent."⁶³ Furthermore, the *sententia* applies only to Rubrius' oath, not to the other "offenses" against *divus Augustus* committed by Faianius.⁶⁴ Tiberius is so focused on the particulars of the case that he fails to give any clear

⁵⁹ Goodyear 1981, 156; Griffin 1995, 49–50.

⁶⁰ These were probably the Ludi Palatini, instituted in AD 14 (Goodyear 1981, 156–7).

⁶¹ Bauman 1974, 76 (italics mine).

⁶² Bauman 1974, 75; see also Sinclair 1992, 402.

⁶³ Walker 1952, 90.

⁶⁴ Bauman 1974, 76.

guidance on his predecessor's status—on how, or whether, Augustus should fit into Roman cultic memory.⁶⁵ Tiberius' glib remark thus undercuts the moderate nature of his proclamations.

Although he does not bring the charges himself, and actually argues against the accusers, Tiberius still shares some of the blame since he has, according to Tacitus, reintroduced *maiestas* in the first place. This is the *Tiberii ars* (Ann. 1.73.1) to which Tacitus refers: Tiberius' apparent *civilitas* actually makes things worse. In keeping with the other medical language, *ars* reminds us of the *ars medica* and "Tiberius' metaphorical role as a doctor" for the state: "The man who should look after his subjects' welfare is using his special skill to ensure their destruction (*exitium*)."⁶⁶ *Ars* also refers to the guileful, disingenuous character of Tiberius' behavior:⁶⁷ he may not *intend* to be destructive to the state, but the guarded nature of his speech and interactions with his subjects ensures bad outcomes. Although at present he makes lenient decisions, he shuts down debate without reprimanding the accusers, something that might have discouraged future accusations.

This might seem to be primarily a legal problem, but it is also a cultic one, and it is directly related to the problem of how deification impacts religious memory. It is extremely telling that the first trial that Tacitus mentions in his discussion of *maiestas* involves alleged offenses against *divus Augustus*. The hapless Faianius and Rubrius thus provide an illustration of the potential for negative consequences of the deification: in declaring Augustus to be a god, the Senate was attempting to commemorate him in a particularly potent way, but the new god also provides a way to bring down Roman citizens. Tiberius acts rightly in opposing the accusers, but he also fails to make a clear and explicit declaration that would stop similar problems from arising in the future. The use of *divus Augustus* in *maiestas* trials shows different members of Roman society attempting to adapt to the newly created cultic memory of Tiberius' predecessor. Tacitus shows Romans working out the "theological" implications of this new addition to the pantheon—an attempt to inscribe a deceased *princeps* into Roman cultic memory—and its negative impact on emperor–subject relations. By describing *maiestas* as a *gravissimum exitium*, Tacitus makes clear that this new cultic memory is bad for society because of the way it negatively impacts thought and behavior as Romans relate to the living Imperial family. The close coupling of Tiberius' succession with

⁶⁵ Similarly, in the *maiestas* trial of M. Granius Marcellus, Tiberius becomes angry when Marcellus is accused of decapitating a statue of Augustus and replacing the head with a portrait of Tiberius (1.74.4). It is unclear whether he is angry at the insult to *divus Augustus*, or at the audacity of the accuser in bringing a charge he considers trivial (see Goodyear 1981, 163–4). In this case, too, the ultimate outcome is acquittal (1.74.6), but Tiberius' inscrutable reaction leaves the senators unsure how he actually views the accusations (as evidenced by 1.74.5, where Cn. Piso asks Tiberius to vote first so that the others will know what he is thinking).

⁶⁶ Woodman 2010, 45.

⁶⁷ OLD s.v. *ars* 3.

Augustus' consecration seems to have created the expectation that elevating *divus Augustus*, at the potential cost of citizens' lives, is a good way of currying favor with Tiberius. This time, he is successful in averting disaster, but the reader is left with no confidence that things are truly mended.

Indeed, the *lex maiestatis* will rear its head again at the end of the domestic material for AD 17, a prominent position in the narrative that draws attention to its importance.⁶⁸ Just as Tiberius is engaged in the apparently pious act of dedicating newly restored temples (*Ann.* 2.49), the *maiestas* law reaches its maturity (2.50.1 *adolecebat interea lex maiestatis*) when Appuleia Varilla, Augustus' great-niece, is accused of adultery and of making jokes (*inlusisset*) about Tiberius and Livia. In the formulation Tacitus uses, where the *maiestas* law is a personified entity⁶⁹ that appears to mature on its own, without any help from the emperor, he could be trying absolve Tiberius of responsibility for the development this trial represents, and indeed he does suggest that Tiberius tried to minimize the law's intensification. By separating the charge of adultery and allowing it to be punished under the *lex Julia* (2.50.2), Tiberius circumscribes the *lex maiestatis* and resists informers' attempts to abuse it by subsuming charges of all kinds under its umbrella.⁷⁰ Likewise, Tiberius refuses to place offenses to *divus Augustus* in the same category as offenses to himself:

maiestatis crimen distingui Caesar postulavit damnarique, si qua de Augusto inreligiose dixisset: in se iacta nolle ad cognitionem vocari. (2.50.2)

(Caesar demanded that the accusation of *maiestas* be kept separate, and that she be condemned if she had made any irreligious statements about Augustus; insults directed at himself he did not wish to be brought to trial.)

This has the appearance of humility, in that Tiberius is distinguishing himself from *divus Augustus* and making it clear that the current *princeps* should be treated differently from his deified predecessor. Yet this is undermined by a subtle shift in the nature of the discourse. While the accuser had claimed only that Appuleia's words about Augustus were scurrilous, Tiberius overtly describes them as impious (*inreligiose*). This represents a shift away from the rhetoric of 1.73.4 (*deorum iniurias dis curae*), where Tiberius had argued that blasphemies uttered against *divus Augustus* did not fall within the remit of human law. Now, things have changed, and Tiberius implies that any speech hostile to his deified predecessor is subject to legal investigation (*cognitio*).⁷¹

The *maiestas* law has now matured, and the accuser's attempts to link insults to Tiberius and Livia with those to *divus Augustus* "laid the foundation for the ambivalent position of the living emperor."⁷² From the moment the

⁶⁸ Koestermann 1963, 346.

⁶⁹ Goodyear 1981, 344.

⁷⁰ Levick 1976, 185.

⁷¹ Bauman 1974, 78 also sees this trial as a turning point in *maiestas* accusations. Cf. Walker 1952, 190; Davies 2004, 193.

⁷² Bauman 1974, 78–9.

Senate voted it, Augustus' deification became closely linked with Tiberius' legitimacy, and there were hints that the new *princeps* should occupy the same plane as his predecessor; the accuser now makes this connection and links words about Augustus with words about Tiberius and Livia. This problematic aspect of deification has become closely bound up with, and cemented by, the "*maiestas* disease." Tiberius misses an opportunity to make a clear and definitive condemnation of such accusations. He draws a clear distinction between himself and *divus Augustus*, but undermines this certainty when he must privately consult Livia about the insults to her before pronouncing to the Senate that these, too, are unlike those to the *divus* (*Ann.* 2.50.2).⁷³ Despite Tiberius' attempts to quash them, such religiously motivated charges seem bound to recur. The deification of Augustus reverberates through Tacitus' early accounts of *maiestas* trials in *Annals* 1 and 2, showing all too clearly that inserting Augustus into Roman cultic memory has destructive potential.

1.4 THE EMERGENCE OF RELIGIOUS FLATTERY

The rise of *maiestas* charges related to *divus Augustus* comes about because informers seem to think that Tiberius will embrace their overzealous attempts to prevent the new god from being dishonored; they apparently decide to pursue offenses against *divus Augustus* in order to curry favor with the living emperor. When they offer similar protections against insults to Livia and Tiberius himself (*Ann.* 2.50), that attempt to curry favor spills outwards, from the *divus* to mortal, living members of his family. But these accusers are not the only ones telling Tiberius what they think he will want to hear. The accusations of *Ann.* 2.50 can be viewed as part of the larger question of how closely living members of the Imperial family should be associated with *divus Augustus*. This is a question that pervades *Annals* 1; beginning immediately after Augustus' deification, the Senate proposes or ratifies various measures associated with cult that seem designed to flatter or elevate living members of the Imperial family. In these episodes we see how the newly created cultic memory of *divus Augustus* can be used to enhance the political status of his living relatives and how Tiberius is implicated in that process.

In the same meeting in which they deify Augustus and turn their *preces* toward Tiberius, the senators also make various proposals to honor Livia. In addition to the suggestions that she be referred to as *mater patriae* and Tiberius as "Son of Julia" (*Ann.* 1.14.1), they also propose honors related to cult, which Tiberius refuses:

⁷³ Cf. Tiberius' similar separation of himself and Livia in the Gytheum inscription declining divine honors (*SEG* xi. 922 = Ehrenberg and Jones 1955, 102b = Sherk 1988, 31, lines 20–1).

ille moderandos feminarum honores dictitans eademque se temperantia usurum in iis quae sibi tribuerentur, ceterum anxius invidia et muliebre fastigium in deminutionem sui accipiens ne lictorem quidem ei decerni passus est aramque adoptionis et alia huiusce modi prohibuit. (1.14.2)

(He, repeatedly saying that honors for women should be kept in check, and that he would use the same moderation in those which were granted to himself, but in reality disturbed by resentment and interpreting womanly eminence as detriment to himself, did not even allow a lictor to be decreed for her, and prohibited an Altar of Adoption and other things of this sort.)

The use of a lictor is presumably allowable because Livia serves as priestess of *divus Augustus*,⁷⁴ although Tacitus does not explicitly mention the office either here or in his discussion of Augustus' deification (1.10.8–11.1). The altar was probably not meant to provide a site for the worship of Livia, but rather to commemorate her adoption into the Julian *gens* in Augustus' will.⁷⁵ In refusing these suggestions, Tiberius excludes Livia as a candidate for the sort of honorific proposals characteristic of the early days of his principate, much as he himself attempts to refuse the position of *princeps* for himself (1.11) and as he will try to exclude Livia from actionable insults in the later *maiestas* trial (2.50). Tiberius' guiding principle is to limit what positions and honors are granted to himself and to other members of the Imperial family, and also to demarcate the Imperial family as members of a category separate from that of *divus Augustus*. But Tacitus declares that Tiberius' real reason for refusing these honors for Livia is not modesty or religious concerns, but his jealous fear that her reputation will eclipse his own. A lictor for Livia would make more obvious her special status as priestess of *divus Augustus*, a role Tacitus' Tiberius seems determined to suppress.⁷⁶ His repeated refusals (1.14.2 *dictitans*) hide a more sinister motivation, just as his repeated refusals of the title *pater patriae* (cf. 1.72.1 *dictitans*) are at odds with his apparent revival of the *lex maiestatis*. So while refusing the honors for Livia appears a laudable attempt to rein in senatorial flattery, Tiberius' actual motives leave the reader in doubt as to whether he will always put up such strong opposition: if his biggest motivation in deciding whether to refuse or allow such honors is a concern for his own reputation as a ruler, what religious flatteries may he allow in the future?

Indeed, the Senate's proposals reveal a worrying tendency toward flattery. Tacitus explicitly labels them as instances of *adulatio* (*Ann.* 1.14.1), a loaded,

⁷⁴ Cf. Dio 56.46.2, where the lictor is connected with her priesthood. For lictors as attendants of priests, see Gizewski 2005.

⁷⁵ For the adoption, see *Ann.* 1.8.1. On the altar, see Furneaux 1896, 203; Maggi 1946, 44; Goodyear 1972, 191.

⁷⁶ In reality, her priesthood seems to have been highlighted as an important part of official "publicity" in the early years of Tiberius' reign, when she was depicted as a priestess on coinage (see Grant 1950, 115–25, esp. 115–17).

and extremely negative, label: *adulatio* directed at the emperor is a corrosive force in society that has the power to distort the truth of historical accounts, warp the minds of rulers, and “discourage *libertas*.”⁷⁷ While the senators may merely be attempting to participate in the commemoration of *divus Augustus* by honoring his wife as his priestess and commemorating her adoption into the Julian *gens* with a special altar, by labelling their proposals as *adulatio* Tacitus implies that they have ulterior motives in these suggestions: trying to perpetuate the memory of the *divus* is also a way of currying favor with the current *princeps*.

The priesthood of the *sodales Augustales*, instituted at the end of AD 14 and conferred upon Tiberius, Drusus, Claudius, and Germanicus (*Ann.* 1.54.1), represents another aspect of the cult of *divus Augustus* that allows an opportunity to elevate living members of the Imperial family. Tacitus has separated this notice from the discussion of the other *caelestes honores* for Augustus (1.15.2), with which it properly belongs, and instead relates it at the end of his narrative of the year AD 14.⁷⁸ Such placement of religious material near the end of a year is not only traditional annalistic practice, as is the Livian expression *idem annus* with which Tacitus introduces the report (1.54.1), but it also draws special attention to the material.⁷⁹ It allows Tacitus to report the establishment of the *sodales Augustales* shortly after his account of Germanicus’ handling of the mutinies and his campaign in Germany (1.33–51), an episode in which the reader first begins to see Germanicus in action as a commander and as an interpreter of the divine (as we shall see in Chapter 2). In particular, the theatrical Germanicus tends to use references to gods (including *divus Augustus*, e.g. at 1.43.3) mostly in order to manipulate his troops, perhaps making the reader doubt his sincerity and suitability as Augustus’ priest.⁸⁰ Tacitus also juxtaposes Germanicus’ priesthood with a reference to the triumph granted him as a result of the German campaigns (1.55.1), a campaign that will prove a serious point of contention between Tiberius and Germanicus. Of the members of Augustus’ new priesthood, Germanicus thus gains particular importance from the narrative position in which Tacitus relates its foundation.

Tacitus’ description of the new priesthood is also designed to make the reader see it as a phenomenon closely connected with the Imperial family, while also hinting at the conflicts arising within that family. Tacitus compares

⁷⁷ Goodyear 1972, 97. For the distortion of the truth in historical writing by *adulatio*, see *Hist.* 1.1.2; *Ann.* 1.1.2. Tacitus describes Domitian’s mind as “blinded and corrupted by assiduous flatteries (*adulationibus*)” (*Agr.* 43.4). *Adulatio* is associated with servility at *Hist.* 1.1.2; *Ann.* 15.61.1, 16.2.2. See also Wirszubski 1950, 164–7.

⁷⁸ Miller 1959, 175; Koestermann 1963, 193.

⁷⁹ Ginsburg 1981, 39; cf. §1.1 and Shannon 2018, 237.

⁸⁰ See §2.2, esp. p. 76.

the *sodales Augustales* with the *sodalitas Titii*, a priesthood dating from the Regal Period.⁸¹ “The same year received new religious rites, with the addition of the priesthood of the *sodales Augustales*, just as Titus Tatius had once instituted the *sodales Titii* in order to retain the rites of the Sabines” (*Ann.* 1.54.1 *Idem annus novas caerimonias accepit addito sodalium Augustalium sacerdotio, ut quondam Titus Tatius retinendis Sabinorum sacris sodales Titios instituerat*).⁸² The priesthood is a significant symbol of the melding of the Roman and Sabine kingdoms, a partnership which Livy portrays as imperfect.⁸³ Comparing the *sodales Augustales* to a priesthood founded during the Regal Period associates the new priesthood of Augustus with a kingship that is venerable with tradition, but also beset by uncomfortable questions about sharing power. This, too, resonates with the conflicts between Tiberius and Germanicus throughout *Annals* 1–2.

The *sodales Augustales* also introduce questions about monarchy and political freedom under a sole ruler. The co-option of four members of the Imperial family dwarfs the reference to the twenty-one other unnamed members of the priesthood⁸⁴ (*Ann.* 1.54.1 *sorte ducti e primoribus civitatis unus et viginti: Tiberius Drususque et Claudius et Germanicus adiciuntur*, “Twenty-one men were selected by lot from among the leaders of the state; Tiberius, Drusus, Claudius, and Germanicus were added”). The priesthood is from its beginning closely associated with the entire Julio-Claudian Imperial house, not just with Augustus himself; in the *Histories*, Tacitus describes their participation in the funeral rites of Nero, the dynasty’s last emperor,⁸⁵ and elsewhere in the *Annals* refers to them as “the personal priesthood of that house” (3.64.4 *proprium eius domus sacerdotium*). Tacitus carefully avoids specifying who proposed the priesthood; perhaps the Senate ratified the decision.⁸⁶ If so, the Senate is seeing to the creation of an institution that Tacitus implies has a lot to do with putting members of the Imperial family into the political spotlight. If the establishment of this priesthood was an important element that “ensured . . . that [Augustus’] worship would be continuously honoured, and that his *memoria* would be eternal,”⁸⁷ participating in the cult of *divus Augustus* is an important way both of honoring the first

⁸¹ By Tacitus’ time, the *sodales Titii* themselves were possibly involved in Imperial cult (Hoffman Lewis 1955, 113–14), and the priesthood had significant overlap in membership with the *sodales Augustales* (Scheid 1978, 639).

⁸² For the connection of these two priesthoods, cf. *Hist.* 2.95.1, where Tacitus claims Romulus (not Tatius) founded the priesthood; the *Annals* passage is perhaps a correction of the version Tacitus gave in the *Histories* (Furneaux 1896, 250; Goodyear 1972, 328).

⁸³ Miles 1995, 207. Joint kingship was proverbially dangerous (Ogilvie 1965, 81). For an example of the tensions between Romulus and Tatius, see Livy 1.14.3.

⁸⁴ Few of their names are known; Rüpke 2008 identifies Cn. Calpurnius Piso (161) (later implicated in the death of Germanicus, at 593), L. Volusius Saturninus (962), and Favonius (679).

⁸⁵ Cf. Ash 2007a, 365, on “the sense of decline in the Augustales honouring Nero.”

⁸⁶ So Hoffman Lewis 1955, 116.

⁸⁷ Gradel 2002, 274.

princeps' memory and of pleasing his successor Tiberius. It is significant that it is primarily members of Augustus' family who are permitted to do this at the highest level, as part of the official state priesthood devoted to Augustus. The Senate, in passing the decree that created the priesthood, is apparently doing something they think or know Tiberius will want, but simultaneously hastening the problematic blurring of *domus Augusta* and *res publica*.⁸⁸

Furthermore, it quickly becomes clear that it is not only senators and others in Rome who can show their loyalty to Tiberius by honoring *divus Augustus*: the same impulse spreads to the provinces. Spanish envoys approach the Senate⁸⁹ to ask whether they may build a temple to the new god: "Upon petitioning, the Spaniards were permitted to build a temple for Augustus in the colony of Tarraco, and a model was given to all the provinces" (*Ann.* 1.78.1 *Templum ut in colonia Tarraconensi strueretur Augusto petentibus Hispanis permissum, datumque in omnes provincias exemplum*). This would have been the first temple to Augustus alone, previously worshipped alongside Roma at an altar rather than in a temple.⁹⁰ The delegation incorporated Spaniards of various communities (*Hispanis* rather than *Tarraconensibus*), so this is "a provincial rather than municipal temple, for which permission would not have been needed."⁹¹ These provincials are thus showing their deference toward the Senate (and, implicitly, toward Tiberius) by asking permission to participate in the cultic memory of *divus Augustus*. And since the Tarraco temple becomes an *exemplum* for all the provinces, provincials are now invited, if not expected, to establish similar temples as a display of loyalty. The entire empire will recognize what the Senate has already learned: worshipping Augustus is what Tiberius expects. With this episode, Tacitus has already begun laying the groundwork for a much more serious case, when the Spaniards will propose another temple for Tiberius himself in AD 25 (4.37–8).⁹²

Tiberius' subjects, senators and Spaniards alike, are learning already that commemorating *divus Augustus* by participating in his cult is a way to show obedience to Tiberius. The boundaries of that commemoration are still being worked out, particularly the question of how living members of the Imperial family should be treated. Some religious honors are approved (membership in the *sodalitas* of Augustus), while others Tiberius declares to be beyond the pale (a lictor and a commemorative altar for Livia). Those boundaries of what

⁸⁸ Cf. Gradel 2002, 279.

⁸⁹ The request in *Ann.* 1.78.1 may be interpreted as taking place during the same Senate meeting where violence in the theatre was being discussed (1.77.2–4). Tiberius was probably present (Millar 1977, 345; Fishwick 1987, 150 n. 3; 1999, 128 n. 32 and 134).

⁹⁰ Goodyear 1981, 177; Fishwick 1987, 155. On the altar and temple, see Hänlein-Schäfer 1985, 64–7, 80, 232–7. On the worship of the *divi* in the Spanish provinces, see Clauss 1999, 399–402.

⁹¹ Fishwick 1987, 155; see also Fishwick 1999, 128–33.

⁹² See §4.4.

constitutes appropriate cultic commemoration will continue to be negotiated and tested; but here, in the very same chapter in which Tiberius fails to stifle *superstitio*-driven concerns in response to the Tiber flood (1.78.3–4), he also allows construction of a temple that will see the spread of Augustus' worship across the empire.

1.5 MAIESTAS DISEASE MEETS ADULATIO DISEASE: THE TRIAL OF LIBO DRUSUS

Tacitus brings together these two threads—deadly *maiestas* trials and religious honors for the emperor and the Imperial family—in his account of Libo Drusus' trial (AD 16). The charges against him do not, like those of Faianius, Rubrius, and Appuleia Varilla, feature *divus Augustus*, but Tiberius himself. They raise similar questions about the relationship between the emperor and the divine: the accusations against Libo have to do with cultic practices, and the defendant is forced to adopt a worshipful attitude toward Tiberius. The Senate responds to Libo's demise with adulatory proposals not unlike those from *Annals* 1. The episode expands upon the picture, which Tacitus has already begun to paint in his account of Tiberius' response to the Tiber floods (*Ann.* 1.76, 1.78), of Tiberius as an autocratic interpreter of questions of cultic memory, and chronicles an important development in the relationship between *princeps*, people, and gods.

Tacitus highlights the importance of Libo's trial by indicating it will be the first instance of a deleterious trend of accusations:⁹³ "I will discuss the beginning, course, and end of that affair rather carefully, because at that time were first discovered the things which ate away at the state for so many years" (*Ann.* 2.27.1 *eius negotii initium, ordinem, finem curatius disseram, quia tum primum reperta sunt quae per tot annos rem publicam exedere*). With *exedere*, Tacitus deploys the language of disease; the word can be used of cancer or similar maladies.⁹⁴ Tacitus' assertion that he will chronicle the beginning of a long-lasting malady also recalls Thucydides' similar claims that his account of the literal plague that famously afflicted Athens may be useful to readers in case of future outbreaks (Thuc. 2.48.3).⁹⁵ Tacitus is reactivating in the reader's mind the notion, first encountered in relation to the *maiestas* trials of *Ann.* 1.73, that such accusations are as deleterious to the Roman state as a disease is to the human body. Yet Tacitus appears to be contradicting himself: he

⁹³ Cf. Koestermann 1963, 299; Shotter 1972, 88.

⁹⁴ See *OLD* 2a; Celsus *Med.* 5.28.12d, 6.18.2i (of infections that eat away at flesh). Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 114.25.

⁹⁵ I thank A. J. Woodman for calling my attention to this parallel.

had claimed that the trials of Faianius and Rubrius in AD 15 were the first appearance of the *maiestas* disease (1.73.1 *quibus initiis*), but now he implies that a *new* disease is beginning with the trial of Libo Drusus in AD 16 (2.27.1 *tum primum*). What exactly is new about Libo's situation? It may be the fact that Libo is the first person in Tacitus' account to die as a result of a *maiestas* accusation,⁹⁶ or that this is the first time in the *Annals* that charges of magic and astrology appear in criminal trials.⁹⁷ These occult charges are in fact the entire focus of the trial: Tacitus gives no details of Libo's alleged revolution (2.27.1 *res novas*) and devotes most of his account of the trial to discussing Libo's consultation of astrologers, magicians, and dream interpreters.⁹⁸ This is a departure from other authors, who do not mention Libo's occult practices.⁹⁹

Regardless of how real a threat Libo may have posed in reality, in Tacitus' portrayal of events he comes across as bumbling and gullible.¹⁰⁰ Libo's credulous nature allows him to be drawn into occult practices, and he is easily susceptible to Catus, who appeals to Libo's familial connections to Pompey and Augustus to urge him toward revolution: "The senator Firmius Catus, one of Libo's close friends, drove the young man—thoughtless and prone to the illusory as he was—to the promises of the Chaldaeans, the rites of magicians, and even interpreters of dreams" (*Ann.* 2.27.2 *Firmius Catus senator, ex intima Libonis amicitia, iuvenem improvidum et facilem inanibus ad Chaldaeorum promissa, magorum sacra, somniorum etiam interpretes impulit*). About Catus we are told no more than his senatorial rank, perhaps an implicit criticism of his sordid behavior in acting as an informant despite his high social position. Tacitus' criticism of Libo as *facilem inanibus* is similar to his depiction of Vespasian in the *Histories*, whose excessive interest in astrology, described as *superstitio* (*Hist.* 2.78.1), "makes him vulnerable to manipulation" by the populace of Alexandria.¹⁰¹ Libo's recourse to the occult appears hasty; his lack of discernment is, for Tacitus, indicative of his foolish character. Indeed, the only consultation of astrologers by Libo that Tacitus actually

⁹⁶ Although Tacitus does not explicitly say so, most scholars agree that Libo was accused of *maiestas*, although there is some debate as to whether occult practices counted as *maiestas* in themselves; see Rutledge 2001, 159 (who prefers to view the accusations against Libo under the umbrella of *sicariis et veneficiis*); Pettinger 2012, 18 n. 53, 25–6.

⁹⁷ Using accusations of magic to condemn one's enemies will become more pronounced during Claudius' and Nero's principates; see §6.4, pp. 262–3 and §7.8, pp. 345–6.

⁹⁸ Walker 1952, 93–5; Shotter 1972, 89; Goodyear 1981, 263. For the conflation of various types of magic (astrology, dream interpretation, drugs, spells, and incantations), see Furneaux 1896, 317; MacMullen 1966, 128–9.

⁹⁹ Cf. Vell. Pat. 2.129.2, 130.4; Sen. *Ep.* 70.10; Suet. *Tib.* 25; Dio 57.15.4–5.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 70.10, and see Barton 1994a, 44. Some scholars have followed Tacitus in assuming Libo was not a serious threat to Tiberius (see literature cited at Pettinger 2012, 8 n. 18), whereas Rogers 1935, 22–3 and Levick 1976, 150–2 see Libo as a potential challenger (see Thakur 2013 for criticisms of this argument).

¹⁰¹ Ash 2007a, 301; see also Shannon 2014, 285. For Tacitus' attitude to astrology, see §0.3, pp. 21–2, and §5.5, pp. 226–9.

describes is also more silly than threatening: one of the accusers produces documents (*libelli*) describing how Libo asked the astrologers whether he would ever have enough money to pave the Appian Way as far as Brundisium (*Ann.* 2.30.1).¹⁰² The details of these *libelli* are said by Tacitus to be pathetic more than anything else: “They also contained other stupid and empty things of this sort—pitiable, if you understood them more leniently” (2.30.2 *inerant et alia huiusce modi stolidi vana, si mollius acciperes, miseranda*).¹⁰³ It is only the final *libellus*, written in Libo’s hand and containing magical signs next to the names of senators and members of the Imperial family, that Tacitus seems to think may have had anything to them (cf. 2.30.2 *tamen*).

Tiberius, however, appears to see these frivolous charges of magic and astrology as a real threat. Given that he himself was a devotee of astrology, as Tacitus himself will eventually reveal,¹⁰⁴ it is perhaps not surprising that he would take such charges seriously. Yet the way Tacitus depicts Tiberius in this episode indicates that he finds fault with his handling of the situation: Tiberius’ conduct during Libo’s trial underlines his hypocrisy and autocratic behavior. His initial treatment of Libo looks impartial, and even warm, on the surface, yet a darker emotion lies underneath:

atque interim Libonem ornat praetura, convictibus adhibet, non vultu alienatus, non verbis commotior (adeo iram condiderat); cunctaque eius dicta factaque, cum prohibere posset, scire malebat, donec Iunius quidam, temptatus ut infernas umbras carminibus eliceret, ad Fulcinium Trionem indicium detulit.

(*Ann.* 2.28.2)

(And meanwhile he adorned Libo with a praetorship,¹⁰⁵ invited him to parties, was not hostile in his expression, not more violent in his speech (to such an extent had he hidden his anger); and all that man’s words and deeds, although he could have stopped them, he preferred to know about—until a certain Junius, having been approached to draw out the shades of hell using spells, brought evidence to Fulcinus Trio.)

Tacitus does not specify how the consultation of Junius was thought to further Libo’s revolutionary designs; perhaps the *infernae umbrae* were instructed to dispatch some of the individuals listed in the *libellus* containing magical symbols.¹⁰⁶ But apparently the consultation of infernal spirits is so serious that it represents a kind of turning point in Libo’s case; some scholars have even argued that Tiberius remained impartial or even sympathetic toward

¹⁰² This may in reality be “evidence of supreme ambition” on Libo’s part (Pettinger 2012, 214); but Tacitus clearly presents it as frivolous.

¹⁰³ Goodyear 1981, 275.

¹⁰⁴ For Tiberius’ interest in astrology, cf. Suet. *Tib.* 62, 69, and *Calig.* 19.3; Dio 57.19.3–4. Tacitus, however, withholds this information until his account of AD 33, just before he describes Tiberius’ death (*Ann.* 6.20.2). Cf. Martin 2001, 144, and see §5.5, p. 226.

¹⁰⁵ On the date of the praetorship, see Goodyear 1981, 270–1; Pettinger 2012, 196–207.

¹⁰⁶ So Ogden 2001, 156.

Libo, until the accusation of necromancy forced his hand (2.28.2 *donec*).¹⁰⁷ Yet that interpretation seems unsustainable, given how Tacitus highlights Tiberius' hidden anger (a sure sign of hypocrisy) throughout. He also states that Tiberius was merely waiting for the bumbling Libo to say or do something incriminating, when he could have stopped him from doing so and prevented his ultimate demise.¹⁰⁸ The charge of necromancy is exactly the kind of movement Tiberius, like a spider lurking in the middle of its web, is waiting for: an excuse to exterminate someone against whom he had harbored anger for some time.

Once the trial begins, Tiberius' mask drops, and his secret anger at Libo manifests itself in a coldness that is more obviously sinister:

die senatus metu et aegritudine fessus, sive, ut tradidere quidam, simulato morbo, lectica delatus ad foris curiae innisusque fratri et manus ac supplices voces ad Tiberium tendens immoto eius vultu excipitur. mox libellos et auctores recitat Caesar ita moderans ne lenire neve asperare crimina videretur. (*Ann.* 2.29.2)

(On the day of the Senate meeting, Libo, exhausted by fear and illness (or, as certain people relate, pretending disease), was brought to the doors of the Senate House in a litter and, leaning on his brother and stretching his hands and suppliant voice to Tiberius, he was received with that man's face unmoved. Next Caesar read out the documents and the names of the people bringing the accusation,¹⁰⁹ controlling himself so as to seem neither to moderate nor to aggravate the accusations.)

Tiberius' physical demeanor gives insight into how the court works. The emperor's *vultus* has the power of life and death.¹¹⁰ Tiberius' control over his facial expression and demeanor when reading out the charges against Libo recalls his earlier pretense of friendliness (cf. 2.28.2 *non vultu alienatus, non verbis commotior*) that concealed his underlying rage (*iram*). Tiberius is still hiding his anger at Libo, but now, as he faces a pathetic, pleading defendant, scarcely able to walk, his impassiveness is much more obviously a sign of ill intent. Indeed, in this passage, Tiberius is depicted as an angry and unresponsive god who refuses to hear the pleas of mortals. The gestures Libo makes toward Tiberius (*manus ac supplices voces . . . tendens*) are those of prayer to a deity,¹¹¹ similar to the senators' gestures toward Augustus' statue and Tiberius' person when begging him to accept the position of *princeps* (1.11.3 *ad effigiem Augusti, ad genua ipsius manus tendere*). Likewise, Libo's "final prayers"

¹⁰⁷ e.g. Seager 1972, 75; Pettinger 2012, 215.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Goodyear 1981, 272 on Tacitus' "disapproval of Tiberius' conduct."

¹⁰⁹ *Auctores* probably refers primarily to Libo's accusers (*OLD* s.v. *auctor* 10b), but the witnesses who testified against him (*OLD* 7) may also be meant; see Goodyear 1981, 274.

¹¹⁰ On the *vultus* of Tiberius, see Corbeill 2004, 159–62.

¹¹¹ For the hand gestures associated with Roman prayer, see Sittl 1890, 190; Appel 1909, 194–8; and Corbeill 2004, 26–7. See also references in n. 37.

(2.30.4 *extremas preces*) just before his suicide recall the senators' *preces* directed toward Tiberius after Augustus' deification (1.11.1). Libo's trial thus provides evidence for the insidious spread of worshipful attitudes toward a living emperor: Senate and court wait with bated breath for the *princeps*' every smile or frown and beseech him as they would a god. Tiberius' tendency toward dissimulation also makes him an ineffective god: he is unwilling to take off his impassive mask and aid a "worshipper" in distress.

Libo's trial is also important because it sees another important development in the health of the state: the growth of senatorial *adulatio*. The aftermath of Libo's suicide is characterized by adulatory decrees of a religious nature, which Tacitus likens to a disease afflicting Rome:

supplicationum dies Pomponii Flacci sententia constituti, [ut] dona Iovi, Marti, Concordiae, utque iduum Septembrium dies, quo se Libo interfecerat, dies festus haberetur, L. Plancus et Gallus Asinius et Papius Mutilus et L. Apronius decrevere: quorum auctoritates adulationesque rettuli ut sciretur vetus id in re publica malum. (*Ann.* 2.32.2)

(On the proposal of Pomponius Flaccus, days of supplication were ordained; and L. Plancus, Gallus Asinius, Papius Mutilus, and L. Apronius decreed gifts to Jupiter, Mars, and Concord, and that the Ides of September, the day on which Libo had killed himself, should be considered a holiday. I have recorded these men's proposals and flatteries, so that that chronic disease in the state might be known.)

These obsequious proposals are all cultic in nature. Giving thanks to the gods could be a reaction to the seriousness of the threat Libo posed,¹¹² and an offering to Concordia also seems appropriate given the alleged sedition that has just been quashed.¹¹³ But Tacitus took care to portray Libo as gullible rather than seriously threatening; involving the gods in thanks for such a "threat" indicates that the senators proposing these honors are losing their sense of appropriateness of occasion for the performance of rituals. The dedications in the temples of Jupiter, Mars, and Concordia, as well as the addition to the festal calendar,¹¹⁴ inscribe the hapless Libo's destruction firmly into Roman cultic memory. At the same time, in another way they write him out of Roman cultural memory forever, by forbidding the use of his *imagines* and of the cognomen Drusus within the Scribonian gens.¹¹⁵ The Senate's decision to expel astrologers, ending in the execution of two of them

¹¹² So Levick 1976, 152.

¹¹³ Alternatively, Concordia could refer to harmony within the Imperial house whose members have been threatened with destruction (Thakur 2013, 645–6 n. 6).

¹¹⁴ The holiday is recorded in the *Fasti Amiternini* (Ehrenberg and Jones 1955, 52 = Sherck 1988, 28A).

¹¹⁵ For these as traditional penalties, see Flower 2006, 134–5.

(2.32.3), also seems to overlook the real problem: *maiestas*. It would be going too far to claim that Tacitus wants the reader to feel sorry for astrologers, who are subversive and often make meaningless predictions (2.27.2 *inania*); but one might reasonably think that *delatores* are at least as much of a threat to society as astrologers. In choosing to focus on punishing the latter, Tiberius and the Senate also overlook the serious problems posed by their own destructive relationship, inherent in the principate since its beginning. Given Tiberius' dissimulation throughout Libo's trial, the Senate has no clear indication of what the emperor thinks of Libo; they merely guess, correctly, that his death must be welcome. It is hardly surprising that they should react, according to the *vetus malum* of flattery (their "default setting" when dealing with an unreadable *princeps*), with adulatory religious ceremonies.

Indeed, Tacitus' use of medical language to describe this political phenomenon makes clear that he sees the problems of flattery, *maiestas*, and religion as interrelated. *Malum* is a standard word for a disease, and *vetus* describes a chronic affliction.¹¹⁶ *Adulatio* of the sort that arose after Libo's trial is thus described as an ongoing illness. For the reader, this imagery is a surprise: Tacitus introduced the episode by likening the trial of Libo to the discovery of a new cancer or wasting illness (*tum primum*, *Ann.* 2.27.1) that has just begun its long devouring of the state. The reader is now forced to reconcile this old disease of *adulatio* with the unspecified, new disease identified at the beginning of the episode. In part, one's interpretation depends on what Tacitus means by *vetus*. If the reader interprets *vetus* from the point of view of hindsight—that is, *adulatio* is an old disease from the point of view of Tacitus' contemporaries in the Trajanic period—there is no conflict: Tacitus would be saying that both *adulatio* and the wasting illness of 2.27.1 were new emergencies in Tiberius' reign but did not disappear thereafter, and continued to have a deleterious impact throughout Roman society's subsequent history. Yet Tacitus does not specify that that is what he means by *vetus*, and so the reader is also free to think that the disease of *adulatio* was old even from the point of view of Romans living at the time of Libo's trial—that is, that *adulatio* had *already* become entrenched by Tiberius' reign. That means that the growth of *adulatio* that erupted after Libo's trial might actually have begun under Augustus.¹¹⁷

As the reader progresses through Tacitus' narrative, each time he encounters disease imagery he is forced to re-evaluate it (especially in the case of Libo, when the labels "old disease" and "new disease" are both applied to the same

¹¹⁶ OLD s.v. *malum* 7b, TLL 8.229.68–230.32; OLD s.v. *vetus* 3b. Also cf. *Ann.* 3.54.1; Celsus *Med.* 4.22.3 *id malum cum inveteraverit*.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Syme 1958, 572: "The infection developed early . . . The historian was not intending to exculpate the previous reign."

incident). That means the reader is constantly forced to reconsider what the starting point might be for this societal decline. This also has important implications for Tacitus' narrative of problems in cultic memory. Just as the problems that surround the question of the deification of emperors did not begin with Tiberius, neither did *adulatio*. Indeed, there is a close connection between senatorial flattery and the worship of emperors. Tacitus has let his authorial voice intrude, highlighting his efforts to increase the reader's knowledge (*rettuli ut sciretur*), just as he did at other moments when he used the language of disease: at the beginning of the Libo episode (*Ann.* 2.27.1 *curatius disseram*), which devolved into prayers to Tiberius; and in the account of Faianius and Rubrius (1.73.1 *haud pigebit referre... ut... noscatur*), which showed how *divus Augustus* could be a detriment to his subjects. As Tacitus describes the progressing illness of Roman society, *maiestas*, emperor cult, and *adulatio* all appear as entries on the patient's chart; they are symptoms of the same disease.

1.6 TIBERIUS CONTROLLING THE TRIUMPH

Alongside these murkier problems, there is another aspect of Roman ritual life where Tiberius more obviously practices direct interference. Tacitus' descriptions of triumphs in the early years of Tiberius' reign add more detail to the picture he paints of the type of *princeps* Tiberius is and how he interacts with his subjects. These triumph episodes also show similar interplay between senatorial flattery and Imperial control, between questions of cultic memory and political concerns. The advent of the principate marked a sharp change in triumphs: they were celebrated less frequently than they had been during the Republic, and after 19 BC they were restricted to members of the Imperial family.¹¹⁸ Imperial writers focused on the emperors' role in their celebration as "a vivid index of political and military worth... 'Good emperors' held proper triumphs for proper victories, while 'bad emperors' held sham ceremonies for empty victories."¹¹⁹ This is usually a judgment on the emperors' conduct of political and military affairs, but a triumph was not only a political honor and an opportunity to display power: it was also a religious ceremony culminating in the *triumphator's* sacrifices or dedications at the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline. The triumph is a prime example of how religion works within Roman society: its political and military significance is not in doubt, but it is

¹¹⁸ Balbus' triumph of 19 BC is the last entry in the *Fasti Triumphales* (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.1.87 = Ehrenberg and Jones 1955, no. 2, p. 36).

¹¹⁹ Beard 2007, 271.

also “fundamentally a religious ritual, an act of devotion and thanksgiving offered by the community to the gods who protected the city... and manifested their good will... by giving... *felicitas*... to Roman armies.”¹²⁰

When an emperor permits or denies someone a triumph, he is therefore making a decision about who is allowed to worship Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and in what way. This has consequences for the relationship between Rome and her gods. As Versnel has noted,

The *triumphator* as the bearer of exceptional “power” gave this ceremony a special significance... this sacrifice was not merely a thanksgiving-sacrifice for the victory, but was at the same time looked upon as a sacrifice *pro salute rei publicae* pointing to the future.¹²¹

Maintaining a continuity of *triumphatores* is important. If the emperor does not allow anyone the opportunity to win a triumph, or refuses to grant triumphs to those who have earned them, he deprives the state of a supply of figures with ritual “power” sufficient to make this extraordinary sacrifice, and one line of communication between Romans and their gods is closed. Likewise, if the emperor grants a triumph to someone who has not earned it,¹²² that individual’s “power” to make the gods well disposed to Rome is correspondingly less. In either case, harm is done to Roman cultic memory.

This ritual significance of the triumph is in evidence, intertwined with the corresponding military and political concerns, at several points in Tacitus’ account when he describes Tiberius’ involvement in the granting of a triumph to Germanicus (the first triumph in the *Annals*). By showing Tiberius using language related to the cultic aspect of the triumph and to emperor cult, Tacitus invites the reader to consider how Tiberius’ involvement in the triumph will disrupt the traditional landscape of religious memory that gave meaning to previous triumphs in Roman history. Tacitus also uses Germanicus’ triumph as a platform for reflecting on the supernatural more generally, both foreshadowing his untimely death and considering the implications of his fate for Roman society in general.

Tacitus reports Germanicus’ triumph at the beginning of his narrative of AD 15. Beginning a year with external affairs is unusual for Tacitus.¹²³ In order to do so here, Tacitus must report the awarding of the triumph *before* describing the beginning of the campaign for which it was awarded; this

¹²⁰ Pittenger 2008, 292.

¹²¹ Versnel 1970, 392. See also Rüpke 1990, 232.

¹²² Tacitus describes two reports of undeserved triumphal insignia (a similar recognition of military success, albeit without the same ritual component as the triumph proper) at *Ann.* 11.20.2 (with Malloch 2013, 294–6) and 11.20.3 (with Malloch 2013, 299–301).

¹²³ Ginsburg 1981, 71–2.

means that Germanicus' triumph is as yet undeserved.¹²⁴ Tacitus' language implies this, too:

Druso Caesare C. Norbano consulibus decernitur Germanico triumphus manente bello; quod quamquam in aestatem summa ope parabat, initio veris et repentino in Chattos excursu praecepit. (*Ann.* 1.55.1)

(When Drusus Caesar and C. Norbanus were consuls, a triumph was decreed for Germanicus, although the war still remained. Although he was preparing war for the summer with the greatest effort, he brought it forward at the beginning of spring with a sudden attack upon the Chatti.)

During the Republic, while there were no firm rules that determined who could or could not celebrate a triumph, there was a general tendency to adhere to traditional precedents where they existed.¹²⁵ There is some evidence that a continuing war in the area where a commander had won a victory could be seen as reason to deny him a triumph.¹²⁶ Tacitus does not express disapproval of the fact that Germanicus is being decreed a triumph except perhaps implicitly, knowing what those words *manente bello* would signify to readers familiar with Republican triumphal procedures, and juxtaposing his report of the theoretical end of Germanicus' war with a description of the energetic beginning of his activities against the Chatti.¹²⁷ And it is not clear at whom Tacitus' implicit disapproval may be directed. It is the Senate that decrees the triumph, but it surely would not have done so without Tiberius' approval.¹²⁸ Tacitus may intend our criticism to be directed at the Senate, which has just elected Tiberius and Germanicus to the *sodalitas Augusti* (*Ann.* 1.54.1), driven by *adulatio*.

Or perhaps we are meant to criticize Tiberius, jealous of Germanicus' military success, for using the triumph to declare his rival's campaigns finished when they clearly were not. Tacitus' disapproval becomes clearer when he describes the letters Tiberius sends to Germanicus to recall him from Germany in AD 16 (*Ann.* 2.26.2–5). Germanicus' reaction suggests that it is Tiberius' personal feelings about Germanicus that are the reason for the triumph:

¹²⁴ Tacitus has reported the events of AD 15 out of order: the triumph was probably decreed in the autumn, following Germanicus' campaigning in the spring and summer (cf. *Ann.* 1.55.1 *initio veris*), at the same time that *triumphalia insignia* were awarded to his legates (1.72.1); see Timpe 1968, 43–6; Ginsburg 1981, 18 and 21; Wille 1983, 372.

¹²⁵ Chaplin 2000, 140, 155; Pittenger 2008, 28–9.

¹²⁶ Cf. Livy 26.21.1–5, where an *ovatio* is decreed instead of a triumph for M. Claudius Marcellus, who defeated Syracuse but was ordered by the Senate to leave his troops in Sicily. For further examples drawn from Livy, see also Chaplin 2000, 144–5, 155; Pittenger 2008, 84–93. For the triumph as *Kriegsbeendigungsritus* ("war-ending ritual"), see Rüpke 1990, 225–6.

¹²⁷ Cf. Goodyear 1981, 69–70.

¹²⁸ Talbert 1984, 362–3 and 518, with bibliography and references there cited. For the role of the Senate in granting triumphs during the Republic, see Beard 2007, 199–214, with further bibliography cited in notes, pp. 369–73.

“Germanicus did not delay any longer, although he understood that these things were fabricated, and that it was out of malice that he was being dragged away from the honor that had already been gained” (2.26.5 *haud cunctatus est ultra Germanicus, quamquam fingi ea seque per invidiam parto iam decori abstrahi intellexeret*). We see Tiberius’ *invidia* at work in his repeated (2.26.2 *crebris*), manipulative, carefully worded letters.¹²⁹ He orders Germanicus to return for the triumph (2.26.2 *rediret ad decretum triumphum*) that had been decreed for him earlier in Tacitus’ narrative (1.55.1) and to leave Germany to Drusus as an arena for winning his own triumphs: “He was to leave raw material for the glory of his brother Drusus, who, since there was at that point no other enemy, would not be able to pursue the name of commander and bring home the laurel if not in the German provinces” (2.26.4 *relinqueret materiem Drusi fratris gloriae, qui nullo tum alio hoste non nisi apud Germanias adsequi nomen imperatorium et deportare lauream posset*). Tiberius activates the vocabulary of cult acts: *deportare lauream* is a direct reference to the laurels that were carried during a triumphal procession, which would then be dedicated to Jupiter in the Capitoline temple, something he could only do if he had been officially granted the triumph.¹³⁰ Tiberius awards Germanicus a triumph, but this apparent honor is also a gesture directed *against* Germanicus: a symbolic, artificial termination of his campaign that will prevent him from winning future triumphal laurels and dedicating those laurels to Jupiter, all motivated by Tiberius’ *invidia*.

Tacitus wants the reader to see the problems that arise in the way Tiberius curtails Germanicus’ opportunity to seek military glory and in the implications of this for cultic memory. This does not mean that Germanicus’ conduct during his campaigns is not open to criticism, or that Tiberius might not have a point when he asserts that the Germans can be left to their “internal discords” (*Ann.* 2.26.3 *internis discordiis*) without further Roman military involvement.¹³¹ Tiberius’ motives for calling Germanicus home may not be entirely confined to personal animosity: perhaps he simply did not want a big war in Germany, or had doubts about Germanicus’ competence, or both.¹³² Nevertheless, the subsequent narrative does not totally reinforce Tiberius’ position,¹³³ at least when it comes to the idea that Germanicus’ recall is intended to ensure opportunities for Drusus. When Drusus succeeds Germanicus, he

¹²⁹ On Tiberius’ letters, see Morello 2006, 336–7. On Tiberius’ *invidia* see Schmal 2005, 67. Tiberius’ admonition that “there had been enough successes, enough misfortunes” (*Ann.* 2.26.2 *satis iam eventuum, satis casuum*) sits uneasily against Tiberius’ wish to send Germanicus to the East “so that he could expose him to trickery and misfortunes” (*Ann.* 2.5.1 *dolo simul et casibus obiectaret*); see Wille 1983, 379.

¹³⁰ Koestermann 1963, 297; Beard 2007, 249–51.

¹³¹ Cf. Tacitus’ digression on the wars between Arminius and Maroboduus (*Ann.* 2.44–6). See also Pelling 1993, esp. 59–61, 76–7.

¹³² Cf. Goodyear 1981, 258.

¹³³ So Pelling 1993, 76–7.

adheres closely to Tiberius' preference for letting the Germans self-destruct through their own internecine squabbles (2.62.1 *ad discordias*). The denouement that follows is more diplomatic than military, as Maroboduus, deserted by his allies, eventually appeals to Tiberius for protection (2.63.1), and Tiberius crows about his own role—not Drusus'—in crushing the German leader (2.63.3 *suaque in destruendo eo consilia extulit*). Drusus' reward for his part in this is not a triumph, but an *ovatio* (2.64.1), as was apparently appropriate when a situation had been settled by diplomacy rather than by actual fighting.¹³⁴ Germanicus is granted the same honor for his activities in the East, where Tiberius redeploys him on what Tacitus implies is a pretext (2.42.1). Certainly the *ovatio* had a long history, even during the Republic, of being used "as a consolation prize for generals who, for whatever reason, were refused a full ceremony."¹³⁵ But the situation here is slightly different: instead of senators debating what sort of reward a general deserved for his achievements on the field of battle, now one man, Tiberius, is deliberately restricting Drusus' field of activity in the first place by influencing him to pursue diplomacy over war.

The difference between a triumph and an *ovatio* has consequences not only for the relative public prestige of each celebration, but also for the cultic aspect of the ceremony and, therefore, for Roman cultic memory. The crown worn in an *ovatio* was not laurel, but myrtle, a visual symbol of the difference in nature between the *ovatio* and the triumph.¹³⁶ Both ceremonies ended in sacrifice to Jupiter upon the Capitoline Hill,¹³⁷ but only a *triumphator* could dedicate laurels; the winner of a triumph presumably had greater ritual "power" to preserve the *pax deorum* than the winner of an *ovatio*, whose military achievement and corresponding "power" was lesser.¹³⁸ Germanicus' consolation-prize triumph, and Tiberius' new strategy, ensure that Drusus will bring back no laurels to dedicate to Jupiter, that Rome will not have a future supply of *triumphatores* to make sacrifices to Jupiter. Tiberius' *invidia* therefore impacts Rome's relationship with the gods; although he claims in his letters that he wants Germanicus to allow Drusus his own chance to "bring home the laurel," what actually happens is rather different.

A further worrying aspect of Tiberius' letters to Germanicus is his activation of the rhetoric of emperor cult when discussing his own exploits in Germany: "He said that he himself, sent to Germany nine times by *divus Augustus*, had achieved more by consultation than by force" (*Ann.* 2.26.3 *se novies a divo Augusto in Germaniam missum plura consilio quam vi perfecisse*). Tiberius'

¹³⁴ Gell. *NA* 5.6.21; cf. Pliny *HN* 15.125, Plut. *Marc.* 22.3. See further Versnel 1970, 166–7; Richardson 1975, 60–2; Beard 2007, 62–3 (who finds these ancient explanations "unconvincing"); Östenberg 2009, 48.

¹³⁵ Beard 2007, 63; see further Richardson 1975; Pittenger 2008, 89–90.

¹³⁶ Versnel 1970, 48, 166; Rüpke 1990, 228.

¹³⁷ Versnel 1970, 184; Beard 2007, 62–3; Pittenger 2008, 294.

¹³⁸ Versnel 1970, 392; Pettinger 2012, 292.

reference to Augustus as *divus* is anachronistic, in that Augustus was still a living mortal when he sent Tiberius to Germany; the label is applied retroactively from the point of view of the time when Tiberius is speaking. This may simply have been the standard way of talking about Augustus in the official language of the Roman state after his official deification: similar “anachronisms” exist in official language, both in literary sources (including elsewhere in the *Annals*) and in official inscribed texts.¹³⁹ Tiberius himself frequently refers to Augustus as *divus* in public or official contexts elsewhere in the *Annals*.¹⁴⁰ But this does not appear to be a hard-and-fast rule: elsewhere he refers to Augustus without *divus* even in official contexts, such as Senate meetings.¹⁴¹ It is therefore significant that Tiberius *does* refer to Augustus as *divus* here: he is encouraging Germanicus to see him in relation to his deified predecessor, much as the Senate had quickly made the connection between the official deification of Augustus (1.10.8) and the prayerful way they should address his ruling successor (1.11.1). And Germanicus quickly realizes that he must follow the same script: in begging for the extension of his command by one year, he is forced to adopt the same stance of a mortal praying to a god (2.26.4 *precante Germanico*). Germanicus’ prayers, however, go unanswered; despite adopting the worshipful posture toward Tiberius that is characteristic of the sycophancy of the age, he is nevertheless prohibited from continuing his campaign and possibly dedicating future laurels to Jupiter.

Germanicus’ triumph also provides an opportunity for Tacitus to hint at the changes that have taken place in the ritual since the days of the Republic. The cultic aspect of triumphal honors becomes central when Tacitus raises the question of *auspicium* in his description of an arch dedicated in Rome in AD 16 commemorating Germanicus’ “victory” in Germany:

Fine anni arcus propter aedem Saturni ob recepta signa cum Varo amissa ductu Germanici, auspiciis Tiberii, et aedes Fortis Fortunae Tiberim iuxta in hortis, quos Caesar dictator populo Romano legaverat, sacrarium genti Iuliae effigiesque divo Augusto apud Bovillas dicantur. (*Ann.* 2.41.1)

(At the end of the year, an arch was dedicated near the temple of Saturn, on account of the recovery of the standards lost with Varus through Germanicus’ leadership and under the auspices of Tiberius. And a temple of Fors Fortuna was dedicated beside the Tiber, in the gardens which the dictator Caesar had bequeathed to the Roman people; and at Bovillae, a shrine was dedicated to the Julian *gens*, and a statue to *divus* Augustus.)

¹³⁹ Cf. *Ann.* 3.62.2, where *divi Augusti* suggests that the events of 40 BC referred to “are being focalised from the speakers’ own time (AD 22)” (Woodman and Martin 1996, 441). In the *SCPP*, Augustus is *divus Augustus* throughout, even when the text refers to events long before his death (e.g. the civil wars with Antony); see Eck et al. 1996, 187 and n. 515; Fishwick 2007, 297–8.

¹⁴⁰ *Ann.* 2.38.3, 3.6.2, 3.54.2, 3.56.4, 6.3.2.

¹⁴¹ *Ann.* 3.71.2, 4.8.5, 4.16.3 (see further §4.3), 6.12.2. He does the same in some “unofficial” contexts: 2.59.2 (in private correspondence with Germanicus); 4.40.6 (in response to Sejanus’ request to marry Livilla).

A commander was traditionally supposed to possess *auspiciū*, *imperium*, and *ductus* simultaneously in order to earn a triumph,¹⁴² and could be refused a triumph if he had fought under someone else's auspices, as happened to the praetor M. Helvius in 195 BC (Livy 34.10.5).¹⁴³ For Germanicus, however, things are different. Tacitus highlights the departure from Republican practice by using unusual language. Tiberius' auspices are denoted with the plural *auspiciis* (the singular *auspicio* was the usual formulation),¹⁴⁴ while Germanicus' *ductus* is still described in the traditional singular: the two traditional elements are still paired, but they look different from the Republican "formula." Even during the Republic, the combination of *auspiciū* and *ductus*, while observed in most cases, was not an absolute requirement;¹⁴⁵ but beginning with Augustus, it became possible to earn a triumph although the emperor, rather than the actual commander, held *auspiciū*.¹⁴⁶ The placement of the triumphal arch is also significant: the temple of Saturn, rebuilt by L. Munatius Plancus from spoils taken in a campaign against Alpine tribes (for which he celebrated a triumph in 43 BC),¹⁴⁷ was among the last examples of a manubial temple vowed by a successful commander who was not a member of the Imperial family.¹⁴⁸ The arch's placement thus draws a contrast between Republican commanders, who had the possibility to achieve military glory and monumentalize it with gifts to the gods, and Germanicus' pseudo-success, artificially curtailed by Tiberius.

Tacitus also mentions Germanicus' arch in the same list as the temple of Fors Fortuna; this is not only an economical way of grouping together temple dedications, in the traditional annalistic mode,¹⁴⁹ but also a political statement. The temple of Fors Fortuna, vowed by Tiberius on land that had once belonged to Julius Caesar,¹⁵⁰ is an example par excellence of temple dedication

¹⁴² See Pittenger 2008, 25 n. 2 on the "formula" *imperio auspicio ductu felicitate*; for examples, see Livy 40.52.5; *CIL* I².626.

¹⁴³ See Versnel 1970, 166–75, 360.

¹⁴⁴ Goodyear 1981, 313.

¹⁴⁵ Chaplin 2000, 151, on Helvius: "The circumstances do not matter so much as the application of the rules... There is... a strong incentive to invent or reinforce precedents in order to justify an activity." See also Versnel 1970, 371; Pittenger 2008, 28; Vervaeke 2014, ch. 4.

¹⁴⁶ On auspices vs. *imperium* see Beard 2007, 297–8. Cf. *IRT* 301 (= *L'Année épigraphique* 1940, no. 68), dating from AD 16, in which *ductus* is assigned to Lentulus Cossus, *auspicia* to the emperor.

¹⁴⁷ Pensabene 1984, 10; Watkins 1997, 132. The building was likely not completed until sometime in the 20s BC.

¹⁴⁸ Pensabene 1984, 10; Claridge 2010, 84. For examples of manubial buildings from the late Republic and early Augustan periods, see Zanker 1988, 65–6; Favro 1996, 82–6; Hekster and Rich 2006, 152–3.

¹⁴⁹ Ginsburg 1981, 35.

¹⁵⁰ The sources mention several temples to Fors Fortuna in the area of Trastevere, and it is difficult to reconcile the conflicting reports (Richardson 1992, 154–5); for one attempt, see Coarelli 2004.

as the province of the Imperial family, standing in stark contrast to the Republican military glories and traditional piety commemorated in the temple of Saturn that abuts the triumphal arch. The temple of Fors Fortuna is located in the gardens of Julius Caesar, who had been celebrated for his special relationship with *fortuna* that brought great military success to the Roman people, and political power to himself; he used the gardens, located near pre-existing shrines of Fors Fortuna, as the site for public benefactions that served as a demonstration of his special *fortuna*. Tiberius, in placing the temple on this site, lays claim to that legacy: Although it is Germanicus who has just won the triumph, it is Tiberius who as *princeps* is heir to Julius Caesar's position, *fortuna*, and status as public benefactor.¹⁵¹ We are reminded not only that triumphs have changed, but also that honoring the gods and participating in Roman cultic memory is now largely in the control of the Julio-Claudians.

Tacitus is perhaps also hinting at the specifically Augustan background of Imperial triumphal procedures. The phrase *signa cum Varo amissa* invites the reader to remember a great German military failure of the Augustan past; although Germanicus' war in Germany is not yet finished, the recovery of Varus' standards means Tiberius can claim to be tying up Augustus' loose ends, while also finding an excuse to grant Germanicus the triumph that will bring him home. Furthermore, juxtaposing Germanicus' triumph with dedications of the shrine and statue of *divus Augustus* at Bovillae (a site important for the Julian *gens* and for emperor cult)¹⁵² reminds us that the god Augustus is still very much present in the minds and eyes of Tiberius and his subjects in modern political life. So the legitimacy of Germanicus' triumph, if it had come up for discussion during the Republic, could have been challenged on two grounds: the fact that the war was not yet finished and the fact that he had fought under another's *auspiciu*m. Yet in this post-Augustan world, Tacitus implies, triumphs are not what they used to be: the standards for awarding them have shifted, and the reasoning behind those decisions becomes much more sinister.

Tacitus also uses Germanicus' triumph to invite the reader to think about Germanicus' fate and the chain of causation ending in his death. He describes the reflections of the crowd watching Germanicus celebrate his triumph at the beginning of AD 17:¹⁵³

vecta spolia, captivi, simulacra montium fluminum proeliorum; bellumque, quia conficere prohibitus erat, pro confecto accipiebatur. augebat intuentium visus

¹⁵¹ Matthews 2011, 51–2, 77–8. On Caesar's *epulum publicum* celebrated in these gardens in 45 BC, see D'Arms 1998, 40–2.

¹⁵² Weinstock 1971, 6–7: fragments of their *Fasti* indicate Bovillae was the seat of the *sodales Augustales*.

¹⁵³ On Tacitus' placement of the notice, see Ginsburg 1981, 65–6; Wille 1983, 386.

eximia ipsius species currusque quinque liberis onustus. sed suberat occulta formido, reputantibus haud prosperum in Druso patre eius favorem vulgi, avunculum eiusdem Marcellum flagrantibus plebis studiis intra iuventam ereptum, breves et infaustos populi Romani amores. (*Ann.* 2.41.2–3)

(Spoils, captives, and images of mountains, rivers, and battles were carried in the procession; and the war, because he had been prevented from finishing it, was accepted as finished. The remarkable appearance of Germanicus himself, and his chariot weighed down with five children, heightened the gaze of the onlookers. But there was a hidden fear under the surface as they considered that the favor of the crowd had not been propitious for Drusus his father, and that Marcellus, the man's uncle, had been snatched away in the midst of his youth while the enthusiasms of the *plebs* were blazing. Brief and ill-omened were the affections of the Roman people.)

While the visual trappings of the triumph are traditional, Tacitus' statement that the war can only be "accepted as finished" undermines the whole show and reminds us how the ritual has been twisted. The visual spectacle of Germanicus and his promising brood of children effects an emotional response from the crowd,¹⁵⁴ but this, too, is problematized when thoughts turn from Germanicus' children to his ancestors, both of whom died young. Germanicus had explicitly compared himself to his father Drusus, because he "dared the same things" (2.8.1 *eadem ausum*) by campaigning in the same place; little did he know that he would also follow his father's footsteps into an early grave. Yet unlike Drusus (who died following an injury sustained by falling from his horse) or Marcellus (who fell victim to an illness),¹⁵⁵ Germanicus' untimely end will occur under a cloud of suspicion. Tacitus hints at this in the ominous word *infaustus*, where Germanicus' popularity is "ill-omened" in two senses. It could signify that the Roman people's affections are "not blessed with good fortune" (*OLD* s.v. *infaustus* 1), i.e. that their hopes for Germanicus are destined to be frustrated by his death. But it could also signify that their affection itself brings about his downfall, with the meaning "bringing ill fortune," or "of evil presage" (*OLD* s.v. *infaustus* 2). The successes in Germany that bring Germanicus to the eye of an adoring public also give rise to *invidia* in Tiberius. Given the pattern of antithesis between Germanicus and Tiberius that Tacitus creates throughout *Annals* 1–2,¹⁵⁶ the reader gets the sense that Germanicus will indeed one day be felled by the Imperial machine. Tacitus hints at the potentially

¹⁵⁴ On the difficult phrase *augebat . . . visus*, see Goodyear 1981, 317–18.

¹⁵⁵ Drusus: see Livy *Per.* 142. Marcellus: see Dio 53.30.4. Although Tacitus raises the possibility that the similarly early deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar could have been due to "the trickery of Livia" (*Ann.* 1.3.3 *Liviae dolus*), he makes no similar insinuations about Marcellus and Drusus.

¹⁵⁶ Pelling 1993, 79.

disastrous consequences of military success in his mention of the comparatively unassuming Furius Camillus, who appears at the end of Tacitus' narrative of the same year. Camillus, Tacitus says, received triumphal insignia (a lesser honor than Germanicus' actual triumph¹⁵⁷) for his successes in Africa. Yet even this lesser honor risked putting him in the Imperial crosshairs, as Tacitus implies: "And the fathers decreed triumphal insignia, which Camillus held with impunity on account of the modesty of his life" (2.52.5 *et decrevere patres triumphalia insignia, quod Camillo ob modestiam vitae impune fuit*). Germanicus would not be so lucky. His triumph, which should be an opportunity for a successful commander to fulfil his vows to the gods, becomes a harbinger of his doom.

1.7 CONCLUSIONS

Now that we have examined *Annals* 1 and 2 in greater detail, let us consider again the example of Tiberius and the Tiber flood with which we began. The autocratic but also ineffective nature of his behavior there is emblematic of his way of dealing with religious issues generally. Tacitus' Tiberius oversees an era in which traditional religious norms are subverted or abandoned, setting off ripple effects throughout society. Tiberius' decision on the flood opens up the worrying possibility that the gods might visit the Romans with further disasters for their neglect of traditional ritual practice; this, after all, is what is at stake when cultic memory is neglected. In the matter of the Tiber, Tiberius does not seem to be acting with malice, but, as we have seen, that is not always the case. His recall of Germanicus, motivated by *invidia* (*Ann.* 2.26.5), has as its logical conclusion the replacement of triumphs with *ovationes*, the drying-up of one powerful ritual channel to secure the gods' continued goodwill toward the Roman state. Similarly, Libo's trial, juxtaposed immediately beside Germanicus' recall in Tacitus' narrative (2.27), highlights the ritual consequences that can arise from Tiberius' fear of competitors: Libo's destruction ensures *adulatio*-driven additions to the Roman ritual calendar and religious sanctuaries (2.32.2). In these episodes, Tacitus shows us the warped relationship between state-wide religious rituals and Tiberius' authoritative tendencies or even personal jealousies. Tiberius' responsibility for the ways we see cultic memory being neglected or altered exposes a crucial fact about life under the principate. Already in the first two books of the Tiberian hexad, we see

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Eck 1999, 225 for the idea of *ornamenta triumphalia* as a "replacement" for the triumph for commanders outside the Imperial family. On triumphal insignia see Boyce 1942; Beard 2007, 70; Agr. 40.1 with Woodman 2014, 289.

indications that Roman religious traditions are going to be altered as a result of the princeps' actions. While change is not *ipso facto* negative, the *kinds* of change that Tiberius' principate seem to encourage are evidently changes for the worse in Rome's relationship with her gods, and the *reasons* for those changes do not augur well for the future.

We can also now contextualize Tiberius' refusal to let the Senate make a determination about the Tiber flood (as was its right according to traditional ways of tackling religious problems) in terms of Tiberius' relationship with the Senate, which has managed to be both co-dependent and adversarial since his accession. As we have now seen, it has been determined from the beginning by cultic memory, as the deification of Augustus immediately bleeds into worshipful treatment of Tiberius himself, with the senators addressing him with *preces* and worshipful gestures (*Ann.* 1.11.3). Tiberius does all too little to curb this behavior. If the toxic relationship between Tiberius and the Senate owes much to the deification of Augustus, it is possible to view Tiberius' exercise of power over the Senate at 1.76 as in some way linked to the deification. This suggestion is strengthened by the narrative proximity of the flood episode to the *maiestas* trials of Faianius and Rubrius (1.73), the beginning of a *gravissimum exitium* in Roman society. But what comes *after* the flood episode is significant, too: Tacitus describes the proposal of a temple in Augustus' honor (1.78.1) and then returns to the Tiber problem, highlighting Tiberius' inactivity and the spread of *superstitio* to which it gives rise (1.79). This narrative intertwining of moments where Tiberius departs from the traditional norms of cultic memory, and moments where *divus Augustus* rises to prominence, allows another interpretation of the Tiber flood: if it is a sign of divine anger, perhaps it is Augustus' deification and its political consequences that are displeasing the gods. Tacitus never makes this connection explicit, but by juxtaposing in his narrative the rise of the *divus* and the beginnings of change in traditional practice, he is able to imply that these two strands of religious memory (innovation and neglect) are two sides of the same coin of religion in the principate.

The Tiber episode is also emblematic of issues throughout Tacitus' narrative in *Annals* 1–2 in that it shows the ripple effect of Tiberius' behaviors and decisions in the area of cult. When Tiberius overrules traditional procedure and prevents the Sibylline books from being consulted, that allows the townspeople of Italy to fall into a *superstitio* they might not have had the chance to display if the emperor had simply followed the time-honored practice of interpreting Tiber floods as signs of the gods' displeasure (*Ann.* 1.79); Tiberius' inaction allows the propagation of religious interpretations that Tacitus explicitly describes as problematic. Augustus' deification, and Tiberius' response to it, reverberate in a similar way. The deification goes ahead despite questions about its appropriateness (1.10.6) and quickly spills over into worshipful treatment of the living emperor. That treatment only escalates as the *Annals*

progress. When things do not go the way someone (e.g. Germanicus, 2.26.4, or Libo, 2.29.2 and 30.4) wants, the default response is to supplicate Tiberius as if he were a god. Tiberius' repeated efforts to keep the Imperial cult "in-house" (for example, by ensuring that members of the Imperial family dominate the *sodales Augustales*, 1.54.1) cannot have dissuaded his subjects from the notion that the current regime and the *divus* went hand in hand. The deadly consequences of this can be seen in the *maiestas* sequence. Despite his earlier assertions, in Apuleia Varilla's case, Tiberius affirms that allegedly irreligious statements about the *divus* are now legally actionable (2.50.2). By allowing the memory of *divus Augustus* to be twisted to the "destruction of citizens," Tiberius reinforces, or at least fails to stop, a rhetoric of religious memory that elevates him to nearly the same status as the *divus*.

In *Annals* 1 and 2, Tiberius' early principate is characterized both by several indications that traditional religious norms or practices are being reshaped or overlooked, and by a significant innovation in cultic memory (the addition of *divus Augustus* to the pantheon). The consequences of these two changes will reverberate throughout the *Annals*, as the relationship Rome has with her gods gradually shows signs of being affected, largely negatively, by the institution of the principate and by the actions of Tiberius. While the neglect of cultic memory (a move away from traditional religious norms and practices, such as senatorial consultation of the Sibylline books in response to floods) is certainly at issue, an equally salient problem is the way Augustus' deification is going to affect Roman principles of cultic memory in the future. Now that Augustus has become a god, we see two forms of memory at work simultaneously: his behavior and desires while he was alive are a model for conduct in the Tiberian present (his memory is preserved without a cultic dimension, for example, by adhering to precedents he established), but Augustus is also now a god who must be commemorated as such with rituals (his memory now has a cultic aspect, too). Such overlap is visible in the trials of Faianius and Rubrius: it is certainly no accident that the first *maiestas* trials Tacitus reports in the *Annals* involve apparent insults to *divus Augustus*. Arguments about Augustus' divinity, and how he deserves to be treated because of that divinity, of course feature heavily—but so, apparently, does legal precedent from the era of Augustus the mortal, who had been the first to allow speech acts to be actionable under the *maiestas* law (*Ann.* 1.72.3). Non-cultic ways of preserving Augustus in cultural memory are complicated and sometimes even overshadowed by the cultic memory he now receives as a god.

While Tiberius is certainly culpable in many of the developments of *Annals* 1–2, he does not bear sole responsibility, either for the neglect of traditional cultic memory, or for the deification that will allow Roman cultic memory to be permanently reshaped by emperor cult. He is also forced to react to new currents running through society: the ways the senators and his other subjects behave in the cultic realm often have a way of guiding the emperor into

problematic reactions. Indeed, it is not clear whether it is Tiberius' decisions or the way the people around him behave that is more at fault, so widespread through society are the problematic religious ideas and behaviors. As we shall see when we turn to an examination of Germanicus, Tacitus does not seem to believe that there is any force or person capable of repairing Rome's fragmenting system of cultic memory.

Germanicus as Religious Interpreter

2.1 INTRODUCTION: GERMANICUS AND RELIGIOUS MEMORY

In the fractured world into which Tacitus drops the reader at the beginning of the *Annals*, Tiberius appears to be the primary figure in the decline of Roman religious memory. It is Tiberius whom senators and provincials “worship” (actually or symbolically), Tiberius who makes the rulings on what counts as an offense to *divus Augustus*, and Tiberius who compromises the future supply of triumphal sacrifices to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. But Tiberius is not the only major figure: Germanicus’ prominence in the narrative of *Annals* 1–2 is so striking that he has frequently been read as a foil for Tiberius.¹ Although this is an oversimplification of Germanicus’ complex characterization, it is true that the inclusion of a second major figure in Tacitus’ narrative is crucial to his conception of the early principate. If the starting point of the *Annals* is designed to de-emphasize the principate’s beginnings under Augustus and show it in full swing under Tiberius, Tacitus is also sure to show us from early on that males of the Julio-Claudian line other than the emperor are essential to his narrative of the principate. Germanicus seems to be a potential candidate for Tiberius’ position when his armies fall into mutiny (*Ann.* 1.31.1)—he never wavers in his loyalty (*Ann.* 1.34.1)—but the prominence Tacitus grants to him in the narrative is indicative of his stature in the eyes of his contemporaries and in Tacitus’ conception of how the early principate unfolded.

Germanicus, as a potential but flawed rival to Tiberius’ position, represents a holdover from the Republican past who, like an endangered creature that has not evolved in response to changes in its environment, is doomed to extinction in the Imperial present. For Pelling, the first to articulate convincingly this now widely accepted viewpoint, he is “nostalgically attractive, brilliant, the sort of thing it is good to write about . . . but out of keeping with the real needs of

¹ See Pelling 1993, 60 and n. 4 for examples.

the modern world.”² Given Germanicus’ status as an outdated figure characteristic of a previous period in Roman history, he is essential for understanding the role of cultural memory in Tacitus’ *Annals*. Germanicus is closely associated with memory: Tacitus links him not just with the past, but with the act of *recalling* the past, by using the word *memoria* at key moments in Germanicus’ life story. When first introduced, Germanicus is described as “born of Drusus” (*Ann.* 1.3.5 *Druso ortum*; cf. 1.33.1 *Druso fratre Tiberii genitus*), and upon the death of Augustus, it is people’s *magna memoria* of Drusus that leads to the belief that Germanicus, if he rose to power, would restore Republican *libertas* (*Ann.* 1.33.2).³ In his turn, Germanicus becomes a figure of *memoria* after his death: “His funeral, without masks and procession, was distinguished by praise and memory of his virtues” (*Ann.* 2.73.1 *funus sine imaginibus et pompa per laudes ac memoriam virtutum eius celebre fuit*).⁴ Piso’s son also cautions his father about Germanicus’ troops’ “recent memory of their commander and the love for the Caesars fixed deep within them” (2.76.3 *recens imperatoris sui memoria et penitus infixus in Caesares amor*). The memory of Germanicus is potent not only when it is fresh,⁵ but also throughout the Julio-Claudian dynasty: both Caligula and Nero are favored for their relationship to Germanicus.⁶ He thus serves as a *lieu de mémoire*, an embodiment of a past that has slipped away,⁷ in two senses: he is significant to others during his lifetime in the context of his relationship to his ancestors and to Tacitus as a symbol of the values of the past. After his death he remains a potent figure in the memories of others.

We might therefore expect Germanicus to be an important figure in Tacitus’ portrayal of memory as it applies particularly to Rome’s religious life. Religious ritual is an important part of cultural memory, and Germanicus finds himself in several situations where ritual action or religious interpretation are called for. These become opportunities to show his peers, and Tacitus’ readers, how he will engage with aspects of Rome’s cultural tradition. Who would be better suited than Germanicus, a figure emblematic of the Republican past, to show traditional piety and follow traditional interpretations of religious material? Yet a careful examination of the narrative of *Annals* 1–2 shows that Tacitus’ portrayal of Germanicus as a religious actor emphatically defies that expectation: he

² Pelling 1993, 78; see also more generally 72–8.

³ For *libertas* as shorthand for a Republican form of government, see Miller 1959, 97; see also Furneaux 1896, 255; Wirszubski 1950, 125–6; Goodyear 1981, 251–2.

⁴ Goodyear 1981, 416 argues that *laudes ac memoriam virtutum* probably refers to the *laudatio funebris*, which had the effect of embedding the deceased strongly in living memory; see Flower 1996, 130–1; Covino 2011, 73–7.

⁵ On the meaning of *recens* in *Ann.* 2.76.3, see Goodyear 1981, 423.

⁶ Caligula: *Ann.* 6.46.1. Nero: *Ann.* 11.12.1 (with Malloch 2013, 197–8), 12.1.2, 13.14.3, 14.7.4. In AD 65 the proposal to rename the month of June “Germanicus” (*Ann.* 16.12.2) may refer to Nero, who had “Germanicus” as part of his official nomenclature (Bartera 2008, 169–70).

⁷ For the concept, see Nora 1992, esp. 6–7.

ultimately fails as a model of traditional piety. As *Annals* 1 and 2 unfold, the nature of that failure is gradually revealed to the reader; various aspects of his relationship with the supernatural are highlighted in Germanicus' activities during the mutiny in Germany (*Ann.* 1.31–5) and his subsequent campaigns there (1.48–51, 55–71; 2.5–26), his travels through the East (2.53–62), and final illness and death (2.69–73).

2.2 GERMANICUS' RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN THE GERMAN MUTINY

Germanicus first comes under Tacitus' microscope in his account of the mutiny in Germany (*Ann.* 1.31–49), which follows closely on the heels of a description of similar troubles in Pannonia (1.16–30).⁸ In terms of the narrative structure of the *Annals*, this means that immediately after hearing about Augustus' funeral and deification (1.10.8), Tiberius' accession (1.11), *adulatio* directed at Livia (1.14), and the foundation of the *Ludi Augustales* (1.15.2–3), the reader moves abruptly to the frontiers of the empire for an exceptionally long excursus⁹ on foreign affairs. That juxtaposition contains an important, if subtle, political comment,¹⁰ for the mutinies are linked with events at Rome, particularly Tiberius' accession. The space Tacitus devotes to recounting the mutinies implies they are serious and calls into question the apparent ease with which Tiberius succeeds Augustus.¹¹ Germanicus' prominence in the mutiny narrative marks him out as a key figure in that uneasy succession. This is key to understanding religious memory in the *Annals*, for the soldiers' rebellion is framed implicitly by Tacitus, and explicitly by Germanicus, as an offense against the gods. The interaction between Germanicus and his soldiers therefore provides a comparandum for the ways Tiberius interacts with his subjects and an opportunity for Tacitus to show whether Germanicus is a better interpreter of the divine than Tiberius. Ultimately, the way Germanicus discusses the gods raises misgivings both about his relationship with his army and about his fitness to interpret religious phenomena.

Tacitus' Pannonian and German mutinies share a similar vocabulary of crime and transgression;¹² yet religious language is especially prominent in the German mutiny, framing the soldiers' actions as crimes approaching sacrilege.

⁸ For the mutiny narratives as a structural unity, see Wille 1983, 364, 367.

⁹ Goodyear 1972, 195; Ginsburg 1981, 85.

¹⁰ Woodman 1977, 228: "The political nature of the German mutiny is not in doubt."

¹¹ Blaensdorf 1994, 764, 768; Woodman 2006a, 303. Tacitus devotes more than half of the narrative of AD 14 to the mutinies, far more space than in the parallel accounts of Vell. Pat. 2.125; Suet. *Tib.* 25; or Dio 57.4–5.

¹² Paladini 1989, 162 n. 30.

The First and Twentieth legions keep extorted money amongst their *signa* and *aquilae* (*Ann.* 1.37.2), an act of “semi-sacrilege” perverting the normal relationship between these standards, which had religious as well as practical significance, and the treasury in a Roman camp.¹³ Even worse is their attack on Munatius Plancus, the leader of the delegation the Senate sends:

illic signa et aquilam amplexus religione sese tutabatur, ac ni aquilifer Calpurnius vim extremam arcuisset, rarum etiam inter hostes, legatus populi Romani Romanis in castris sanguine suo altaria deum commaculavisset. (1.39.4)

(There, embracing the standards and the eagle, he protected himself with their sanctity; and if the eagle-bearer Calpurnius had not fended off extreme violence, a legate of the Roman people would have polluted the altars of the gods with his blood, a thing rare even between enemies.)

The soldiers’ disregard for the religious significance of the *signa* and *aquila* is unlike anything described in the Pannonian revolt. It would be shocking enough for Rome’s enemies to kill one of her legates on their camp altar,¹⁴ so it is all the worse that Romans are the killers (as emphasized by the anaphora of *Romani Romanis*).¹⁵ The rare word *commaculare*, used elsewhere in contexts of religious pollution,¹⁶ also emphasizes the heinousness of the crime. This army is so unconcerned with *religio* that it comes close to committing actual sacrilege.

Contrast this disregard for the divine with the troops in the Pannonian mutiny, who are (perhaps excessively) attuned to signs of divine displeasure. An eclipse (*Ann.* 1.28.1–3) and a storm that they interpret as a sign of divine wrath (1.30.2–3) have the power to reverse their mutinous mindset. Tacitus describes them as influenced by *superstitio* in the fear they display during the eclipse (1.28.2; cf. 1.29.3), indicating that Drusus’ army, ignorant of the eclipse’s true cause (1.28.1 *miles rationis ignarus*), are *too* ready to take the gods into account. The two armies’ different mistakes, and the responses of their respective commanders, allow Tacitus to explore the dangerous territory into which soldiers’ religious scruple (or lack thereof) can lead, to show different models for how leaders should respond, and to show what Germanicus is like as a religious interpreter.

¹³ Miller 1959, 159; Goodyear 1972, 269. On the religious significance of the standards, see Helgeland 1978, 1503; Rüpke 1990, 186–8; Wheeler 2009, 245–53; of the *aquila*, Herz 1975; Speidel 1976, 140–2; Helgeland 1978, 1474–7; Wheeler 2009, 253–9. The *signa* and *vexilla* were kept in the shrine (*sacellum* or *aedes*) of a Roman fort (Johnson 1983, 112–15; Rüpke 1990, 181; Wheeler 2009, 260).

¹⁴ On the presence of altars inside Roman camps, see von Petrikovits 1975, 76–8; Stoll 1992, 99–100, 590–1; Rüpke 1990, 167, 181–2.

¹⁵ Fulkerson 2006, 176.

¹⁶ Cf. Sall. *Iug.* 102.5; *Hist.* 1.55.21; Virg. *Ecl.* 8.48 (with Clausen 1994, 252–3); Stat. *Theb.* 8.74 and 11.752. Tacitus also uses the word in a figurative sense at *Ann.* 16.32.3.

Both armies can be manipulated by their commanders, but that manipulation is sometimes problematic. During the Pannonian eclipse, Drusus springs into action and capitalizes on the Pannonian soldiers' superstitious fear of an event he recognizes as a chance occurrence: "Caesar, thinking that he should make use of the change and that the offerings of chance should be turned into wisdom, ordered a circuit of the tents to be made" (1.28.3 *utendum inclinatione ea Caesar et quae casus obtulerat in sapientiam vertenda ratus circumiri tentoria iubet*). Roman commanders who ignore bad omens out of an excess of pride and/or rationalism often come to bad ends in the historical tradition;¹⁷ in this particular case, however, Drusus seems to be in the right. His rationalization of the eclipse as the result of *casus* chimes with Tacitus' assessment of it as an act of *fors* (1.28.1).¹⁸ Drusus is an effective leader, able to avoid falling into interpretive traps and exploiting his troops' irrational fear in order to control them. Whereas Drusus capitalizes on his soldiers' pre-existing religious fears, Germanicus manipulates his troops in an attempt to generate a similar fear of the gods where none previously existed. In responding to the soldiers' treatment of Plancus, Germanicus' strategy is to shock them into obedience by "railing at their fateful madness, and saying that it was because of the wrath not of the soldiers, but of the gods, that that madness was flaring up again" (*Ann.* 1.39.6 *fatalem increpans rabiem, neque militum sed deum ira resurgere*). With Germanicus' words ringing in their ears, the soldiers depart cowed rather than pacified (1.39.6 *attonitaque magis quam quieta contione*): Germanicus' rhetoric, too, has had its intended psychological effect.

Germanicus' words are significant not only for the soldiers, but also for the reader. If the gods are angry at the soldiers, this immediately raises the question of that anger's cause. Tacitus' description of events strongly suggests that the gods might have had a right to be angry; the mutinous soldiers' disregard for the sacred status of the *signa* and *aquila* would surely not make the gods happy, although no defilement of them with Plancus' blood has actually occurred. Germanicus mentions divine anger and the mistreatment of Plancus, but does not connect the dots between them. Instead, he frames the soldiers' madness as a *manifestation* of divine anger¹⁹ rather than its cause; this language is so striking that commentators have suggested Germanicus is attempting to shift

¹⁷ e.g. P. Clodius Pulcher, who loses the battle of Drepana after proceeding into battle despite a negative omen from the sacred chickens (*Cic. Nat. D.* 2.7; *Livy Per.* 19; *Suet. Tib.* 2.2; see Levene 1993, 3–4); and C. Flaminius, who disastrously joins battle with Hannibal at Lake Trasimene in defiance of several bad omens (*Cic. Div.* 1.77 = *Coelius Antipater* F 14b Cornell, with Briscoe in Cornell 2013, iii.248; *Livy* 22.4.12–13 with Levene 1993, 38–42 and Levene 2010, 133–5).

¹⁸ See Fulkerson 2006, 171. For rational responses to natural phenomena as the characteristic of a good commander, see *Frontin. Str.* 1.12; *Cic. Rep.* 1.25; and *Plut. Per.* 35.2 (on Pericles); Paladini 1989, 159–60; Williams 1997, 49; Ash 1999, 130.

¹⁹ So also Maggi 1946, 98.

responsibility on to the gods and away from the army he is trying to pacify.²⁰ Furthermore, Tacitus draws attention to the rhetorical nature of Germanicus' statements (*Ann.* 1.39.6 *facunde*), implying they were carefully calculated to produce a particular effect. Germanicus does understand the minds of his troops and knows how to frighten them into submission with talk of angry gods; but it is not clear whether he understands the mechanics of *deum ira* and how to deflect it. Whereas Tacitus takes the trouble to make sure the reader knows Drusus' opinion of the Pannonian eclipse (it was a chance occurrence, not a sign from the gods) and to show that he agrees with that assessment, he gives no similar insight into Germanicus' thoughts. There is a disconnect between what Drusus tells his troops and what he thinks privately; but in Germanicus' case, we do not know what he is really thinking.

As the mutiny progresses, Germanicus continues to exploit the rhetoric of ritual pollution and divine retribution. In his next speech, responding to criticisms of his decision to keep his wife and infant son with him during the mutinies (*Ann.* 1.40.2), Germanicus makes it clearer that the soldiers' sacrilegious actions are responsible for the *deum ira* that manifested itself so strongly in the attack on Plancus:

coniugem et liberos meos, quos pro gloria vestra libens ad exitium offerrem, nunc procul a furentibus summoveo, ut quidquid istud sceleris imminet, meo tantum sanguine pietur, neve occisis Augusti pronepos, interfecta Tiberii nurus nocentiores vos faciant. quid enim per hos dies inausum intemeratumve vobis? quod nomen huic coetui dabo? militesne appellem, qui filium imperatoris vestri vallo et armis circumsestidistis? an cives, quibus tam proiecta senatus auctoritas? hostium quoque ius et sacra legationis et fas gentium rupistis. divus Iulius seditionem exercitus verbo uno compescuit, Quirites vocando qui sacramentum eius detrectabant: divus Augustus vultu et aspectu Actiacas legiones exterruit: nos ut non eosdem, ita ex illis ortos si Hispaniae Syriaeve miles aspernaretur, tamen mirum et indignum erat. (1.42.1–3)

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(My spouse and children, whom I would gladly offer up to destruction for your glory, I now move far away from you madmen, so that whatever crime of yours hangs over us may be expiated by my blood alone, and the slaughter of Augustus' great-grandson and the slaying of Tiberius' daughter-in-law may not make you even more guilty. For what have you left undared or undefiled in recent days? What name shall I give to this gathering? Am I to call you soldiers, when you have surrounded the commander's son with your palisade and weapons? Or citizens, when you have so renounced the Senate's authority? You have violated the rights due even to enemies, the sacredness of the legion, and the law of nations. *Divus Iulius* put to rest the sedition of his army with one word, by referring to those who evaded his oath as "Quirites;" *divus Augustus* terrified the legions at Actium with

²⁰ Furneaux 1896, 233; Woodman 2006a, 321.

his expression and demeanor. I am not like them; but I am descended from them, and if the soldiery spurned me in Spain or Syria,²¹ it would still be strange and undeserved.)

The tenor of Germanicus' rhetoric has shifted, for he now makes more explicit the religious problem that the soldiers' attack on Plancus presents, building up a picture of an army that has embarked upon a series of sacrilegious acts. He indicates that his troops are about to commit further impious slaughter (*scelus*) and that the killing of Caligula or Agrippina would be merely another crime in a series (comparative *nocentiores*) which will need to be ritually expiated by his own blood sacrifice (*pietur*),²² and emphasizes the soldiers' ferocity with wording that recalls Virgil's description of the monstrous Cacus.²³ Germanicus depicts the attack on Plancus as the beginning of the soldiers' impiety. He now explicitly states that the embassy from Rome was afforded an inviolate status which the soldiers transgressed (*sacra legionis*), whereas previously he emphasized only the delegation's legal rights (1.39.6 *ius*): the attack on Plancus was not only contrary to civilized behavior, but also showed a blatant disregard for legates' religious protection. Germanicus' reference to *deum ira* in the previous speech, which looked like a deflection of blame away from the soldiers, now emerges as an indictment of their sacrilegious behavior.

But this apparent awareness of the soldiers' crimes as religious problems, and the *deum ira* that may result and require expiation, comes in a context that is marked by self-aggrandizement and a desire to persuade. Germanicus' offering himself up as a sacrificial victim is flamboyant, excessive, and reminiscent of the similarly theatrical gesture toward suicide he made at *Ann.* 1.35.4–5 (an incident to which he refers in this speech, 1.43.1), a sign of his poor leadership.²⁴ Almost like an actor following a script, Germanicus voices hesitation over what to call the soldiers, directly alluding to previous speeches of commanders to mutineers and emphasizing that his speech, too, is a carefully constructed piece of rhetoric working within a rhetorical tradition. Scipio had used the same tactic in a speech to mutineers (Livy 28.27.3–4), and indeed Germanicus' entire speech has intertextual reminiscences of Scipio's.²⁵ But Germanicus draws parallels with different commanders: Julius Caesar, who famously quelled a mutiny at Placentia simply by addressing his soldiers

²¹ That is, "an army to which I was personally unknown" (Furneaux 1896, 236).

²² For the religious connotations of *piare* and its compound *expiare*, see *TLL* 10.1.2183.24–36; Lennon 2014, 33–4.

²³ Virg. *Aen.* 8.205–6 *ne quid inausum aut intractatum scelerisve dolive fuisset*; see Baxter 1972, 250. The Virgilian character of the phrase is strong, given that *inausus* and *intemeratus* (cf. *Aen.* 2.143, 3.178, 11.584) are probably Virgilian neologisms (Harrison 1991, 69; Horsfall 2000, 215; Horsfall 2003, 339). The expression also recalls Vocola's *incorrupta et intemerata* (*Hist.* 4.58.6), which also uses the language of religious pollution (see Ash 2010, 225).

²⁴ Pelling 1993, 62–4.

²⁵ Woodman 2006a, 313, 322.

as “Quirites,”²⁶ and Augustus, who allegedly pacified a mutiny shortly after Actium with a mere look.²⁷ Despite his protestations that he is not of the same stature as Caesar and Augustus, Germanicus clearly wishes his troops to see their image in him. So even when he displays an awareness of the sacrilegious nature of his troops’ actions, he does so in a context of psychological manipulation (by placing himself firmly in a tradition of commanders who use rhetoric to sway their troops) and theatrical self-aggrandizement (by comparing his achievements with those of his now-divine predecessors).

Germanicus refers explicitly to Caesar and Augustus as *divi*; although this was the official title of each, there seems to be a larger rhetorical purpose at work here. This continues in the prayer that closes Germanicus’ speech:

tua, dive Auguste, caelo recepta mens, tua, pater Druse, imago, tui memoria
isdem istis cum militibus, quos iam pudor et gloria intrat, eluant hanc maculam
irasque civiles in exitium hostibus vertant. (*Ann.* 1.43.3)

(May your mind, *divus Augustus*, admitted to the heavens, and your image, father Drusus, your memory among these very soldiers, whom shame and glory now enter, wash away this stain, and turn wrath amongst citizens to the destruction of the enemy.)

He invokes both divine Augustus and the memory of the human Drusus to remove pollution and direct the soldiers’ *ira* into its proper channel.²⁸ The word *macula* shows Germanicus reinforcing the rhetoric of ritual pollution with which he began.²⁹ Yet, strikingly, the beings to whom he prays for assistance (including Drusus, who is not actually a god) are both related to him personally. Furthermore, in the next sentence, Germanicus changes his address from the gods to the soldiers themselves. This emphasizes that the invocation of members of the Imperial family and the language of pollution and purification are to Germanicus primarily pieces of useful rhetoric intended to persuade the soldiers. Germanicus also seems to be showing the influence of the problematic elision of divine and non-divine members of the Imperial house (*divus Augustus* and non-*divus* Drusus; the two *divi* Augustus and Julius Caesar and his own mortal self in 1.42.3) that has characterized rhetoric at court during Tiberius’ accession.

Germanicus’ words influence the soldiers, who, in the posture of suppliants, beg him to punish and pardon their past conduct and lead them to future glory: “Becoming supplicatory at these words and confessing that his reproaches

²⁶ The name implies that they have the status of civilians rather than soldiers. See Lucan 5.358; Suet. *Iul.* 70; Dio 42.53.3; App. *B Civ.* 2.93, with Goodyear 1972, 291.

²⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 17.3 claims it took Augustus twenty-seven days to pacify the mutiny, so the problem may not have been solved as easily as Germanicus asserts (cf. Wardle 2014, 132).

²⁸ For the distinction, see Davies 2004, 183 n. 137.

²⁹ Woodman 2006a, 323. For the use of *macula/maculare* to describe religious pollution, see Lennon 2014, 33. See also Lennon 2014, 35 on compounds of *luere* to describe purification.

were true, they begged him to punish the guilty, pardon the lapsed, and lead them against the enemy” (*Ann.* 1.44.1 *supplices ad haec et vera exprobrari fatentes orabant puniret noxios, ignosceret lapsis et duceret in hostem*). They then rush off with minds changed (1.44.2 *discurrunt mutati*) to punish the mutiny’s ringleaders. Their commander has performed a clever and well-calculated sleight of hand by introducing the concept of *deum ira* and gradually expanding to a full-blown critique of their transgressions, with the desired psychological effect. As it turns out, Germanicus’ soldiers are as susceptible to the supernatural as Drusus’ were, and Germanicus is just as canny as Drusus, but there are key differences. Germanicus is the sole source of this religious explanation of events: whereas in Pannonia the superstitious soldiers were able to look to the sky and draw their own conclusions, on which Drusus could capitalize, in Germany it is only the commander who can suggest that the troops have acted transgressively.

Furthermore, Germanicus’ rhetoric bears problematic fruit, in that the soldiers adopt his motifs with a similar hastiness and theatricality. Germanicus’ self-aggrandizing invocation of the *divi* has evidently sunk in; the soldiers’ supplication (*supplices*) and prayer (*orabant*) to their commander show that the worshipful treatment of the Imperial house has spread from the capital to the far-flung armies. Germanicus’ imagery of blood sacrifice seems to inspire the soldiers to similarly bloody thoughts. In Caecina’s camp, Germanicus’ tearful and dramatic criticism of the mutinous soldiers’ bloodbath (*Ann.* 1.49.2) effects a hasty enthusiasm for battle:³⁰

Truces etiam tum animos cupido involat eundi in hostem, piaculum furoris; nec aliter posse placari commilitonum manes quam si pectoribus impiis honesta vulnera accepissent. sequitur ardorem militum Caesar. (1.49.3–4)

(Their minds (savage even then) were seized with a desire to go against the enemy as an expiation of their madness; in no other way, they thought, could the shades of their fellow soldiers be placated than if they received honorable wounds on their impious breasts. Caesar followed his soldiers’ ardor.)

The soldiers’ minds are still “savage,” and they decide that the best *piaculum* is enemy blood;³¹ they have internalized Germanicus’ rhetoric,³² but without actually calming down (in contrast to Drusus’ troops, whose “love of obedience gradually returned” [1.28.6 *tum redire paulatim amor obsequii*]). They also have not considered the problematic connotations of human sacrifice that is the corollary of Germanicus’ rhetoric of religious guilt. Their desire to attack is described as *cupido* attacking them, a rare and vivid formulation calling attention to the violence of their desire.³³ The commander simply drifts along

³⁰ Goodyear 1972, 313 remarks on the swiftness of their change of heart.

³¹ See Sailor 2008, 239 n. 129.

³² Cf. Koestermann 1963, 182; Fulkerson 2006, 181.

³³ On *cupido* here, see Koestermann 1963, 182; Goodyear 1972, 313; Woodman 1998, 228.

with the tide of opinion he has created. Thus, while the outcome of Germanicus' intervention is positive (the mutinies are put down), the mechanism is religious language that manipulates the soldiers rather than impressing upon them an understanding of their sacrileges, and it is accepted in a worryingly uncritical way. Germanicus fails to exert full control over the army; "Even a Germanicus, with all his natural rapport with the troops, can do no better than this."³⁴

The next episode shows the danger inherent in the hasty adoption of a religious attitude by mercurial soldiers under a charismatic commander:

non sexus, non aetas miserationem attulit: profana simul et sacra et celeberrimum illis gentibus templum quod Tanfanae vocabant solo aequantur. sine vulnere milites, qui semisomnos, inermes aut palantes ceciderant. (*Ann.* 1.51.1)

(Neither sex nor age aroused pity: things both sacred and profane were levelled to the ground, even the sacred precinct which they call Tanfana's, most famous among those races. The soldiers themselves were without wound, and they had attacked men who were half asleep, unarmed, or wandering about.)

Overwhelming these Germans, in the midst of a party and perhaps intoxicated (cf. 1.50.4), is not particularly difficult or glorious,³⁵ and attacking women and the elderly is troubling. The soldiers emerge unscathed (*sine vulnere*), a far cry from the *honesta vulnera* (1.49.3) they wanted as a *piaculum* for their bloody mutiny. Destroying such an important shrine, even if it belongs to barbarians, has the potential to arouse divine anger,³⁶ and Tacitus emphasizes the totality of its destruction. Including the name of the goddess lends emphasis to this particular item among generalized *sacra* and gives the passage an ethnographic flavor that recalls Tacitus' (not unsympathetic) treatment of foreign shrines in his other works.³⁷ Germanicus' rhetoric from the Plancus episode seems to have evaporated, and the soldiers now turn their atrocities against the Germans. Thus, we see the problematic nature of Germanicus' relationship with his armies. When soldiers rely on proclamations from their superiors instead of thinking carefully about the connotations and consequences of their actions, sacrilege can result. Germanicus is culpable for the theatricality of his behavior and, particularly, for his failure to give his troops

³⁴ Pelling 1993, 68.

³⁵ Koestermann 1963, 185.

³⁶ Roman legal tradition on the status of foreign sacred places was inconsistent. Trajan claimed non-Roman land was not subject to consecration (Pliny *Ep.* 10.50), but Gaius *Inst.* 2.5–7 implies that provincial land declared *religiosus* should be treated as it would in Rome (Honoré 1962, 124–5; Ando 2008, 114–8). Herodotus' Cambyses is a famous example of punishment for violation of a foreign religion (see Hdt. 3.30.1, 64.3, and 37–8, with Humphreys 1987, 214; Harrison 2000, 212; Mikalson 2003, 143). Titus may have been reluctant to destroy the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, perhaps out of religious scruple (Rives 2005, 149–51).

³⁷ Tacitus also discussed the *templum* (perhaps a sacred grove) of Tanfana at *Germ.* 40.3 (see Koestermann 1963, 168; Rives 1999, 294–5); cf. *Germ.* 39.2 (with Rives 1999, 289) for such groves' sanctity. Cf. Tacitus' not unsympathetic digressions on the details of shrines to unfamiliar Eastern divinities in the *Historiae* (see Shannon 2014).

clear guidance about religiously correct behavior—not unlike the emperor back in Rome. Tacitus' narrative of the German mutinies thus shows the reader that Germanicus' manipulative use of religious rhetoric with his troops makes him no better at communicating religious interpretations than Tiberius is.

2.3 *MEMORIA DEFORMES*: COMMEMORATING VARUS

The mutiny narratives set the stage perfectly for the subsequent campaign against Arminius, where fate, omens, and religious pollution feature heavily. Memory of the recent past plays an important role in how both Germans and Romans view the upcoming conflict: the specters of Varus and his slaughtered legions occupy an important place in their imaginations, raising the possibility that history is going to repeat itself, and that Germanicus and his legions will be slaughtered just as those of Varus were. Germanicus must commemorate that Augustan past, but the political situation in the Tiberian present makes this a fraught enterprise: although Tiberius is hundreds of miles away, nevertheless it is always he who has the final say on questions of ritual procedure, and Germanicus ultimately fails to navigate that minefield unscathed.

Tacitus indicates early in his narrative of the campaign against Arminius that supernatural concerns will play an important role. Tacitus implicates fate in Varus' demise, making clear that human and superhuman factors were both responsible for his failure: "But Varus fell due to fate and the strength of Arminius" (*Ann.* 1.55.3 *sed Varus fato et vi Armini cecidit*).³⁸ The strength of Arminius, the "disturber of Germany" (1.57.2 *turbator Germaniae*) embroiled in a second conflict with pro-Roman Segestes,³⁹ evidently remains a problem for Germanicus, and Tacitus' language raises the possibility that *fatum* will also still be against him: does the same fate apply to any Roman who fights Arminius? The reader, with the benefit of hindsight, knows that Germanicus will avoid Varus' fate, but the way Tacitus sets up the beginning of the campaign suggests that things must have felt very different at the time.

Yet if "Arminius vs. Varus" has been set up as a possible script for Germanicus to follow, there have been some changes to it, inviting reflection on how the world has changed now that not only Varus, but also Augustus, has died. Segestes once again throws his lot in with the Romans, sending legates to

³⁸ On the issue of divine vs. human causation in this passage, see Goodyear 1981, 74; Cupaiuolo 1984, 31. Contrast Velleius, who suggests that supernatural forces are entirely responsible for Varus' failure, because the divine (*deus*) made him ignore a warning from Segestes (Vell. Pat. 2.118.4, with Woodman 1977, 196–7; Schmitzer 2000, 215).

³⁹ Cf. *Ann.* 1.55.1.

Germanicus to request help against his countrymen who disagree with his pro-Roman stance (*Ann.* 1.57.1). But his son Segimundus, a member of the legation, has a checkered history: a priest in the cult at the *ara Ubiorum*, he is said to have rejected his office and cast off his ceremonial *vittae* “in the year in which Germany revolted” (1.57.2 *anno quo Germaniae descivere*), i.e. at the same time as Varus’ destruction in AD 9.⁴⁰ The *ara Ubiorum* was conceived as a center of emperor worship for the entire province of Germany and was probably dedicated to Augustus and Roma.⁴¹ The cult of *divus Augustus* at this altar, beginning in his own lifetime, was thus a powerful symbol of Roman dominion, envisioned as a cult center for what would one day be a new province, to be sited near the legion’s headquarters.⁴² In throwing off his *vittae*, a badge of office similar to those worn by *flamines* at Rome,⁴³ Segimundus expresses his disdain for the altar and its cult as a symbol of Roman attempts to control his people. The Romans’ return to the area after the Varian disaster prompts Segimundus to worry that Germanicus will hold this against him, a fear that ultimately proves unfounded (1.57.2). But by reporting the story of Segimundus’ repudiation of his priesthood in a flashback in the middle of his account of Germanicus’ campaign, Tacitus reminds the reader of the German tribes’ hostility after Varus’ defeat and raises the possibility that a hatred of Roman-founded cults might feature again in Germanicus’ conflict.

The unrepentant Arminius does indeed seem to think of the cult at the *ara Ubiorum* as a detestable attempt at Roman control and, in a speech to the Cherusci, he scathingly includes Segimundus’ priesthood among other signs of Roman domination:

cerni adhuc Germanorum in lucis signa Romana, quae dis patriis suspenderit. coleret Segestes victam ripam, redderet filio sacerdotium hominum.⁴⁴ Germanos numquam satis excusaturos quod inter Albim et Rhenum virgas et securis et togam viderint. aliis gentibus ignorantia imperi<i> Romani inexplerta esse supplicia,

⁴⁰ Goodyear 1981, 79; Woodman 2004, 30 n. 81.

⁴¹ See Miller 1959, 160; Hänlein-Schäfer 1985, 253–4; Fishwick 1987, 137–8; Liertz 2000, 94.

⁴² Fishwick 2002, 20; Steenken 2005, 125–8.

⁴³ Fishwick 2004, 225.

⁴⁴ I follow Miller 1959, 182 and Woodman 2004, 31 in retaining the MS’s *hominum*. On the textual issue, see John 1963, 380–1; Goodyear 1981, 87. There is no parallel for the phrase *sacerdotium hominum*, but cf. Cic. *Phil.* 2.110, in which Cicero refers to Antony, *flamen* of *divus Julius*, as “priest of a tyrant or of a dead man” (*sive... tyranni sacerdos... sive... mortui*), and 1.13, with Weinstock 1971, 290–1; Ramsey 2003, 114. Goodyear 1981, 87 objects that *hominum* is plural, whereas the altar was dedicated to only one person, Augustus (Roma presumably does not count as *homo*). Yet the *ara Ubiorum* could also have been associated with other members of the Imperial house, perhaps Drusus, just invoked at *Ann.* 1.43.2, whose statue or cenotaph was nearby (Dio 55.2.3; see Rich 1990, 219; Swan 2004, 37). This need not mean that Drusus actually received cult there, but the presence of statues or other memorials of Drusus in the region might lead Arminius sneeringly to associate Segimundus’ priesthood with toadying up to multiple members of the Imperial house.

nescia tributa: quae quoniam exuerint inritusque discesserit ille inter numina dicatus Augustus, ille delectus Tiberius, ne imperitum adulescentulum, ne seditiosum exercitum pavescerent. (*Ann.* 1.59.3–5)

(In the groves of the Germans, he said, the Roman standards could still be seen, which he had hung up for the ancestral gods. Let Segestes inhabit the conquered bank, and give back to his son the priesthood of human beings; the Germans would never sufficiently excuse the fact that they had seen rods, axes, and the toga between the Elbe and the Rhine. Other races enjoyed ignorance of Roman command, had not experienced punishments, did not know tributes; but since they had shaken these things off, and since that Augustus, consecrated among the gods, and that Tiberius, his chosen one, had departed disappointed, they should not fear an untried youth and a seditious army.)

The contrast between the *di patrii* who guard Varus' standards and the deified Augustus whom Segimundus worships suggests that Arminius holds a contemptuous view of Augustus' deification.⁴⁵ Arminius seems to be claiming that Augustus is not really a god, but just another human. This designation would, strictly speaking, be wrong, since after being declared a god by the Senate Augustus can no longer be classified as a mere *homo*. However, Arminius is hardly informed by what the Senate decrees, but rather, serves as the mouthpiece for a violently anti-Roman viewpoint; he can hardly be expected to accept that Augustus is not a human but a god merely because the Senate says so (if indeed he knows about the decree at all).⁴⁶ He may find it problematic that Augustus was still alive at the time the altar (and presumably the priesthood) was founded,⁴⁷ but Arminius' skepticism seems mostly to stem from the fact that the cult is related to other symbols of Imperial control. There are other indications of the dim view Arminius takes of this priesthood. It is characteristic of Roman sympathizers like Segestes who inhabit the "conquered bank" of the Rhine.⁴⁸ As a symbol of the Roman control that Arminius despises, it is comparable to the *fascies* and toga that once shamefully encroached even beyond the Rhine, and the *imperium*, *supplicia*, and *tributa* of the Romans from which the Germans have successfully freed themselves once already. The ironical tone⁴⁹ of *ille inter numina dicatus Augustus, ille delectus Tiberius* expresses further derision: even the commander whom the Romans considered powerful enough to be officially made a god was not enough to conquer the German tribes permanently, nor did his chosen successor Tiberius truly stand a chance of success; and now Germanicus, inferior to both of them, will be yet more ineffectual.

The way Arminius links the deified Augustus and the mortal Tiberius, both equally powerless, is like a more acidic reformulation of *Ann.* 1.10.8–1.11.1,

⁴⁵ Maggi 1946, 132; Miller 1959, 182; John 1963, 381.

⁴⁶ See Sinclair 1995, 23 on Arminius' speeches as "political agenda."

⁴⁷ Woodman 2004, 31 n. 31.

⁴⁸ Cf. Sinclair 1995, 20.

⁴⁹ Koestermann 1963, 206.

where the juxtaposition of Augustus' deification and Tiberius' accession showed the close connection between the predecessor's apotheosis and the successor's political position, or of the rhetorical game Germanicus has been trying to play by comparing himself with the *divi* Julius and Augustus, and by invoking Augustus in his prayers. Arminius, however, unlike the Romans, can see through the ploy of Augustus' deification. Whereas Germanicus and Tiberius invoke divine Augustus to legitimate themselves, in Arminius' eyes any relationship with a Roman *divus* achieves the opposite, emphasizing Roman weakness in the face of German resistance. For him, emperor cult fails as a tool of control in a land where Varus' standards, which he himself dedicated, still hang in the groves sacred to the German ancestral gods. Arminius' own act of ritual commemoration is permanent, while the influence and power of the *divi* and other Romans was shattered when Varus was exterminated.

Germanicus' visit to the Teutoburg Forest heightens the sense that he could become another Varus. The episode is one of the prime passages for Tacitus' engagement with the concept of memory: Tacitus produces an "almost dizzying effect of presents shifting into pasts"⁵⁰ as we see Germanicus, his troops, and Tacitus himself reflecting on the act of memorialization as they revisit the battlefield and build a tumulus to bury the bones of Varus' legions. But commentators have not sufficiently appreciated the explicitly religious dimension of the episode (encompassing both the supernatural concept of fate and the details of ritual procedure) and how this links the memorialization of the Teutoburg dead inextricably with the larger question of Germanicus' character. How Germanicus behaves here is an important component of how he fits, or fails to fit, into the Tiberian world where traditional systems of religious memory are beginning to show strain.

Remembering the Varian disaster is an unpleasant exercise for those who fought in the initial battle, for whom the landmarks of the battlefield are "sad sites, hideous in appearance and in memory" (*Ann.* 1.61.1 *maestos locos visuque ac memoria deformes*). The landscape prompts ruminations about tragedy and destiny, but not for everyone who looks upon it: "Therefore Caesar was seized with a desire to discharge the funeral rites for the soldiers and their leader, with the entire army that was present moved to pity for their relations, friends, and finally for wars' misfortunes and the lot of humans" (1.61.1 *Igitur cupido Caesarem invadit solvendi suprema militibus ducique, permoto ad miserationem omni qui aderat exercitu ob propinquos, amicos, denique ob casus bellorum et sortem hominum*). The troops' reflection on human fate (*sors*) is in line with the possibility that Germanicus' army may be doomed to repeat Varus' disaster. The intertextual relationship between

⁵⁰ Seidman 2014, 96.

this passage and Tacitus' description in the *Histories* of Vitellius' similar visit to the site of the battlefield at Cremona provides an instructive comparandum. Some members of Vitellius' entourage react in the same way as Germanicus' troops, with pity (*Hist.* 2.70.3 *misericordia*) and an acknowledgment of the role of fate (*varia sors rerum*), unlike Vitellius himself, who actually enjoys the gruesome sights and remains ignorant of fate and doom (2.70.4 *laetus ultro et tam propinquae sortis ignarus*).⁵¹ Vitellius, the clueless commander, is disturbingly immune to the implications of the battlefield at Cremona: that human luck can change, and that *sors* may ensure a bad outcome just as easily as a good one.⁵² Germanicus does not explicitly share Vitellius' ignorance of *sors*, but his desire (*cupido*) to see the battlefield, a trait he does share with Vitellius (*Hist.* 2.70.1 *concupivit*), may imply rashness or even an ulterior motive: "Curiosity seconded piety perhaps."⁵³ Germanicus' *cupido* is therefore contrasted with the soldiers' *miseratio*, the "appropriate response" to seeing the battlefield.⁵⁴ Because Germanicus, unlike some of his soldiers, was *not* present at the original battle on the site he now surveys, he desires to see what he cannot fully understand. In *Ann.* 1.61.2–4, arguably among the most vivid and macabre scenes in Latin literature, Tacitus recreates the progress of the battle between Varus' troops and the Germans who defeated them, focalized through the soldiers' own memories of the events, which the reader has already been told are discomfiting memories shaped by thoughts of fate and pity. Crucially, the sight of the battlefield arouses pity in the *entire* army (1.61.1 *omni...exercitu*), not just those soldiers who survived the original battle; participation in the initial event is not necessary to be affected with fellow feeling for the remembered sufferings of acquaintances and friends who did participate. As Tacitus describes the troops' collection of the bones, he emphasizes their sadness, growing anger, and sympathy for the anonymous dead, whom they treat as if they were kin (*Ann.* 1.62.1).

Crucially, however, we are given no insight into Germanicus' thoughts and emotions: we have no indication of how Germanicus reacts to the scene, and what lessons (if any) he draws from it. We see only that he continues with the same canny ability to understand his troops' emotions and use them to his own advantage that he displayed in the German mutiny. Germanicus plays upon the strong feelings of pity and dread experienced by his army when he takes center stage in the act of reburial: "In constructing the mound, Caesar placed the first piece of sod, in a duty to the dead that was most pleasing, sharing with those present in their grief" (1.62.1 *primum exstruendo tumulo*

⁵¹ On similarities between the two episodes, see Woodman 1979; Goodyear 1981, 94, 96–7.

⁵² See Seidman 2014, 106.

⁵³ Goodyear 1981, 94; cf. *Ann.* 2.54.1, and also §2.2, p. 71 on the troops' behavior during the German mutiny. For *cupido* in Tacitus' account of Germanicus, see Woodman 1998, 218–19; Woodman 2015, 261–2.

⁵⁴ Ash 2007a, 275.

caespitem Caesar posuit, gratissimo munere in defunctos et praesentibus doloris socius). Both the adjective *gratus* and the noun *munus* can be regularly construed with the preposition *in* followed by the accusative, so it is unclear whether Tacitus means “a duty that was most pleasing to the dead” or “a duty to the dead that was most pleasing.”⁵⁵ If *in defunctos* depends on *gratus* and Germanicus’ actions are being described as pleasing to the dead soldiers, this suggests that Germanicus is acting out of genuine concern for burying their remains and putting their *manes* to rest.⁵⁶ But if *in defunctos* depends on *munere*, it remains unclear to whom the “duty” of burial is “most pleasing;” perhaps it is to Germanicus himself,⁵⁷ or perhaps it is to his troops. Certainly the phrase *praesentibus doloris socius* placed emphatically at the end of the sentence indicates concern for the soldiers looking on: in taking an ostentatious role in burying the bones of Varus’ army, Germanicus endears himself to his own men, especially those who served with Varus. The reader notes the piety that accompanies the act of burial for the soldiers, but remains uncertain whether Germanicus shares their dedication to laying the spirits of the slaughtered to rest. This is similar, then, to the troops’ observations on “the lot of humans,” which Germanicus does not necessarily share: he may be more like the ignorant Vitellius than he at first appears.

Regardless of Germanicus’ motives, this symbolic act is important for boosting morale, which is necessary given the overtones of fate and repeating the doom of Varus that Tacitus has evoked. Furthermore, in giving a Roman burial to Roman dead, Germanicus is inserting a civilizing reminder of Roman ritual into the barbaric German religious landscape. The tumulus can be seen as a response to the physical memorials of horrific German ritual practices from the time of Varus’ defeat that currently exist on the site: “The fragments of weapons and the joints of horses lay nearby, and likewise heads fixed on to the trunks of trees. In the neighboring groves were barbarian altars, upon which they had slaughtered the tribunes and centurions of the first ranks” (*Ann.* 1.61.3 *adiacebant fragmina telorum equorumque artus, simul truncis arborum antefixa ora. lucis propinquis barbarae arae, apud quas tribunos ac primorum ordinum centuriones mactaverant*). The sacred groves commemorate German ritual practices that show their violent resistance to Roman control; they are where, as Arminius has noted, Varus’ standards still hang as dedications to the German gods (1.59.3). But these altars where Roman officers

⁵⁵ *Gratus* is usually construed with the dative (*OLD* s.v. *gratus* 3), but can also take *in* + acc. to denote a person to whom something is pleasing (e.g. *Livy* 9.33.5; *Tac. Ann.* 1.28.3 and 2.59.4; see Gerber and Greef 1903, 507). For *munus* + *in* + acc., see examples cited by Goodyear 1981, 99; so also Gerber and Greef 1903, 886 and *TLL* 8.1667.10.

⁵⁶ Burial is necessary for the repose of the spirits of the dead throughout classical literature: *Homer Il.* 23.75–6; *Pliny Ep.* 7.27.11; see also Rüpke 1990, 202–3; Hope 2000, 105–6. For the link between the *manes* and the burial place, see Toynbee 1971, 35–8.

⁵⁷ Cf. Gerber and Greef 1903, 507 (“i.q. *grato animo oblatum*”).

were sacrificed are a far more potent sign of the barbarism of the German tribes, notorious for sacrificing humans to their gods.⁵⁸ The very landscape thus embodies the Germans' gruesome cultic memory, and Germanicus and his troops are trying to reinscribe the fearsome woods with a physical memorial of Roman funerary ritual, in which the remains are reinterpreted as departed comrades rather than as barbaric offerings to barbaric gods. Tacitus' wording also evokes Virgil's grim description of the monster Cacus' doorposts decorated with the severed heads of his victims (*Aen.* 8.196–7), "a prototype for the semi-human barbarians who fastened Roman skulls to tree-trunks."⁵⁹ Yet despite the verbal similarities, Germanicus will not fill the role of Virgil's monster-slaying Hercules; the reader knows Germanicus will ultimately fail to avenge Varus fully by killing Arminius, whereas Hercules' slaughter of Cacus earns him the label "greatest avenger" (*Aen.* 8. 201–2 *maximus ultor*).⁶⁰ Germanicus' tumulus likewise will ultimately fail to make a permanent mark on the German landscape, since it is destroyed the following year and never rebuilt (*Ann.* 2.7.3).⁶¹ So although this is a laudable attempt to reclaim part of the German landscape for Rome and Roman ritual, there are also doubts about its success.

Germanicus' building of the tumulus causes a more immediate problem in bringing him into conflict with Tiberius, who criticizes the ostentatious reburial as a cause of religious pollution:

quod Tiberio haud probatum, seu cuncta Germanici in deterius trahenti, sive exercitum imagine caesorum insepultorumque tardatum ad proelia et formidolosiores hostium credebat; neque imperatorem auguratu et vetustissimis caerimoniis praeditum adtrektare feralia debuisse (*Ann.* 1.62.2)

(Tiberius did not approve of this, whether interpreting all Germanicus' deeds for the worse, or he believed that the army would be slow to battle and more fearful of the enemy due to the image of the slaughtered and unburied men; but he said that a commander endowed with the augurship and its most ancient sanctities should not have handled funeral things.)

Tacitus *in propria persona* gives two possible explanations for Tiberius' disapproval (prejudice against Germanicus, concern for the morale of the army). He then goes on to relate (in *oratio obliqua*) Tiberius' professed reason for objecting (ritual pollution), which does not match either of Tacitus'

⁵⁸ Cf. *Germ.* 9.1; for archaeological and literary evidence for human sacrifice among Germanic peoples, especially in war, see de Vries 1956, 1.408–14; Todd 1987, 164, 182–5; Rives 2005, 158–9. The sacrifice of prisoners of war was particularly significant (de Vries 1956, i.412). For Greeks and Romans, human sacrifice was a mark of barbarism and hostility to "civilization" (Rives 1995, 67–70, 77–8).

⁵⁹ Woodman 1979, 148–9.

⁶⁰ See also §2.4, p. 97, on *Ann.* 2.22.

⁶¹ See further this section, p. 89.

explanations.⁶² The mismatch between Tiberius' *ostensible* motivation and what Tacitus suggests are his *actual* motivations prejudices the reader against Tiberius: when Tacitus tells us that Tiberius was motivated by either X or Y, but Tiberius professes to have been motivated by Z, this predisposes the reader to reject Z as a plausible reason for criticism. Tiberius uses religious objection as a smokescreen for whatever he is really thinking.

Was Tiberius right to object? Certainly some Roman priests were thought to be ritually polluted by contact with the dead. The prohibition applied to *pontifices*, who could not make sacrifices or dedications after learning of the death of a family member and were prohibited from viewing corpses.⁶³ Augustus and Tiberius seem to have taken this aspect of the office of *pontifex maximus* particularly seriously.⁶⁴ Prohibition on contact with corpses is likewise well attested for the *flamen Dialis*, who was allowed to participate in a funeral procession but could not be in close proximity to a tomb or touch a corpse.⁶⁵ Yet even these rules do not provide evidence that there were any *general* standards for priestly purity: such prohibitions were not consistent across-the-board requirements, but applied only to a few specific priesthoods and situations.⁶⁶ Where such ritual prohibitions exist, they are linked to specific priestly offices not held by Germanicus. He would eventually become a *pontifex*, but probably not until AD 17; at the time of the visit to Teutoburg, in AD 15, he was a member of the Arval Brethren, a *sodalis* of Augustus (cf. *Ann.* 1.54.1), and, as Tiberius explicitly notes, an augur.⁶⁷ The augurate, which Rüpke calls "the most politically sensible of the colleges," could easily be combined with a magistracy and attendant military service, because, unlike the *flamen Dialis*, an augur was not constrained by any specific taboos preventing him from contact with war or death.⁶⁸ Similar rules probably did not apply to Germanicus' other priesthoods, either, nor is it clear from Tacitus' wording that Tiberius is referring to anything besides Germanicus' augurship: the phrase *auguratu et vetustissimis caerimoniis* makes more sense taken as

⁶² Koestermann 1963, 214. Maggi 1946, 138; Whitehead 1979, 482; and Goodyear 1981, 99 do not distinguish between Tacitus' and Tiberius' voices and view all three rationales together as alternative explanations.

⁶³ Livy 2.8.7; Serv. *Aen.* 3.64.

⁶⁴ Augustus separated himself from Agrippa's corpse with a curtain while giving his *laudatio* (Dio 54.28.4–5), as Tiberius did at Drusus' funeral (Sen. *Cons. Marc.* 15.3). Each held the office of *pontifex maximus* at the time in question. Tiberius was *pontifex* even before Augustus' death and therefore needed to be excused for contact with his corpse (Dio 56.31.3). See Lindsay 2000, 156.

⁶⁵ Gell. *NA* 10.15.23. See Furneaux 1896, 234; Rüpke 1990, 65; Lindsay 2000, 154–6.

⁶⁶ Lennon 2014, 50.

⁶⁷ Rüpke 2008, 736. Even the *flamines* of the Imperial cult (of which Germanicus was also eventually one [*Ann.* 2.83.1]) were probably not members of the pontifical college (van Haepelen 2002, 83), so this would not make Germanicus subject to pontifical prohibitions on interactions with corpses. Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 99 suggests that augurs were deprived of their office for various offenses more rarely than other types of priests.

⁶⁸ Rüpke 1990, 63–6; see also Rüpke 2008, 645 n. 4.

a hendiadys (“the most ancient sanctities of the augurship” or “augural sanctities”), rather assuming that *caerimoniis* refers to ritual obligations distinct from the augurship.⁶⁹

Furthermore, the Romans did not always consider it problematic to lay aside ritual rules, even those applying to specific priestly offices, when observing them could compromise military enterprises.⁷⁰ Given that Rome’s leading statesmen typically held both priesthoods and magistracies that would require them to wage war, practicality would seem to dictate that contact with the dead could not always be forbidden out of concern for ritual pollution.⁷¹ For example, Julius Caesar was elected *pontifex maximus* in 62 BC and retained the office throughout his Gallic campaigns until his death, and Octavian was *pontifex* in the year of the battle of Actium.⁷² Furthermore, it was normal and even expected for Roman commanders personally to see to burying their dead.⁷³ When a disaster left no survivors to carry out the rites, reburial of the victims after an interval was also generally viewed positively.⁷⁴

Tiberius’ criticism, then, is not (or at least not entirely) valid: it is not clear that bans on *imperatores* and augurs being involved in funerals existed, or were strictly enforced if they did exist. Even if Tacitus’ readership was not familiar with the byzantine distinctions of what was and was not allowed for members of particular priesthoods, Tiberius’ criticism of Germanicus remains suspect on one further count: Tiberius alleges that Germanicus’ violation consists of handling the human remains himself (*adtrektare feralia*), but that is not actually borne out by Tacitus’ description of what happened. In contrast to Suetonius’ description of the same events, where Germanicus does indeed “collect” the bones “with his own hand” (*Calig. 3.2 colligere sua manu*), in Tacitus’ account he does not:⁷⁵ the wording of *Ann. 1.62.1* implies that it is the soldiers (*exercitus*) who do the actual work of collecting and burying

⁶⁹ Goodyear 1981, 100. On the meaning of *caerimoniae* in the *Annals*, see Woodman and Martin 1996, 423; it can refer to the inherent holiness of a place or object, the reverence and ritual actions owed to them, or the taboos imposed on specific religious functionaries (Roloff 1953, 108, 116–17). *Caerimoniae* is used as a placeholder for the name of a priestly office at *Ann. 1.54.1* (Koestermann 1963, 214), so it is possible that here it refers to one of Germanicus’ two other known priestly offices, but I find this unlikely. Germanicus’ position as *sodalis Augustalis* can hardly count as “most ancient” (*vetustissimae*) given that the priesthood was only founded in the previous year (1.54.1). If Tacitus had in mind Germanicus’ membership in the Arval Brethren, he surely would have named it explicitly; the Arvals are mentioned nowhere in Tacitus’ works.

⁷⁰ Goodman and Holladay 1986, 161–4; Lennon 2014, 128, 140.

⁷¹ Lindsay 2000, 156.

⁷² Caesar: Rüpke 2008, 124–30, 754–5. Octavian: Rüpke 2008, 135, 585.

⁷³ Rüpke 1990, 203; Peretz 2005, 124–31. Tacitus appears critical of Apronius’ failure to bury his troops after a Roman bloodbath at the hands of the Frisians (*Ann. 4.73.3*, with Martin and Woodman 1989, 258).

⁷⁴ Peretz 2005, 125. Tacitus reports no criticism when Corbulo sees to the burial of the legions lost with Paetus (15.28.2). Corbulo entrusts Paetus’ son, a military tribune, with the task; Corbulo was a member of the *epulones* but is not known to have held any other priesthood (Rüpke 2008, 661), so probably the reason for delegating the task was not related to religious concerns.

⁷⁵ Koestermann 1963, 214.

(*humo tegetet*) the bones, whereas Germanicus simply lays the symbolic first piece of sod on the mound. The facts of Tacitus' narrative do not bear out Tiberius' accusation, lending credence to the possibility that the emperor is searching for a pretext to catch Germanicus in an error: he is choosing an interpretation of Germanicus' actions that allows him to criticize his rival publicly by exaggerating and twisting his deeds into ritual pollution. The sense that Tiberius is out to entrap Germanicus by whatever means necessary is intensified by the swift narrative shift from a description of the burial to Tiberius' reaction, collapsing the spatial and temporal distance between Rome and Germany. This "no doubt implies the sinister omnipresence of the emperor. No matter how far Germanicus travels, Tiberius still knows all."⁷⁶

Nevertheless, Tiberius' positioning of himself as the ultimate arbiter in ritual decision-making does have a legitimate basis, and this is more significant than his "sinister omnipresence" in the provinces. As *pontifex maximus*,⁷⁷ Tiberius has a uniquely powerful position to make religious decisions in Rome: the office had gained importance under Caesar, and Augustus gave the *pontifex maximus* an unprecedented place at the head of the Roman religious system.⁷⁸ Traditionally, the *pontifex maximus* had authority mainly within the college of pontiffs, but during the empire this authority expanded until the emperor was the main religious "decision-maker."⁷⁹ Furthermore, the issue of the proper conduct of funerals is specifically part of the authority of the *pontifex maximus*, as Pliny the Younger was aware when he referred to Trajan a question that had arisen in Bithynia about the reburial of remains from damaged tombs (*Ep.* 10.68); the authority of the *pontifex maximus* in this area extended beyond Italy, throughout all the provinces.⁸⁰ Tiberius' occupancy of the position of *pontifex maximus*, a direct result of the institution of the principate, means that his ruling on whether Germanicus acted according to religious norms in the Teutoburg Forest is absolute, whether or not what Germanicus did was a problem according to traditional rules about priestly

⁷⁶ Pagán 1999, 311; see also Pagán 2002, 56–7.

⁷⁷ Tiberius probably acquired the office in the *comitia* of March AD 15 (van Haepereen 2002, 135–6).

⁷⁸ Ridley 2005, 300.

⁷⁹ Stepper 2003, 158 and *passim* ("Entscheidungssträger"). The Senate probably consulted just the *pontifex maximus* rather than the entire pontifical college (van Haepereen 2002, 194–5, 264). On the relationship between the *pontifex maximus* and other priesthoods in the Republic, see Bollan 2013, 48–56, 59–62; for a caution on the limits of his authority over other priests, see Rüpke 2014, 234–5.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Dig.* 11.8.1, and see Williams 1990, 120; Stepper 2003, 174–5; *contra*, see Sherwin-White 1966, 655–6. On the religious problems that may result from moving a body, see Estiez 1995, 106–7; this could not be done for reasons of mere convenience, but only in some extenuating circumstance, such as damage to the original tomb.

ritual pollution. Indeed, by using the word *caerimoniae*, a term encompassing the particularities of ritual conduct that accrued to certain offices,⁸¹ Tiberius is perhaps highlighting this aspect of his office: he casts himself as the foremost authority on whether *caerimoniae* have been respected, as the upholder of tradition and religious memory.⁸²

Therefore, although Germanicus' participation in the ritual was perhaps informed by self-interested motives, Tiberius' condemnation is based less on the traditional rules governing priestly conduct and Tiberius' concern for those rules, than on his own authority: it is less important whether Tiberius is right than whether he is *pontifex maximus*. Just as with the Tiber flood of *Ann.* 1.76,⁸³ the emperor's word is law. Here, Tiberius is using that power to frame the reburial of Varus' legions as a conflict between himself and Germanicus, a conflict Tiberius automatically wins. In view of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that after the Chatti destroy the altar to Drusus and the Teutoburg tumulus, Germanicus chooses to restore only the altar, but decides that "it did not seem wise to reconstruct the tumulus" (2.7.3 *tumulum iterare haud visum*).⁸⁴ Given Tiberius' well-known fondness for his brother Drusus,⁸⁵ restoring his altar is perhaps a conciliatory gesture. By not rebuilding the tumulus, Germanicus avoids provoking Tiberius again: he does not take the chance of handling any more human remains, knowing now (as he perhaps did not before) that this will only be to wave a red flag in front of the bull. The Teutoburg Forest episode therefore shows Tiberius and Germanicus as rival religious interpreters, each with his own agenda (winning over the troops; criticizing a rival). Tacitus himself never indicates which man is right on the question of ritual pollution, but because Tiberius is *princeps* and *pontifex maximus*, whatever the particulars of the case, Germanicus cannot win.

2.4 GODS ON OUR SIDE? DREAMS, SIGNS, AND VENGEANCE

Although Tiberius seems to be censuring Germanicus' ritual conduct in the Teutoburg Forest mostly out of prejudice against him, subsequent events lend some support to Tacitus' second alternative explanation for Tiberius' criticism: troop morale. Tiberius may have been all too right to worry that seeing Varus' army of bones might have a deleterious effect on Germanicus' flesh-and-blood soldiers. This again brings up the question of whether history will repeat itself in Germany and whether Germanicus' legions will suffer another

⁸¹ See n. 69.

⁸² Cf. Giorcelli 1995, 241.

⁸³ See §1.1.

⁸⁴ Cf. Koestermann 1963, 269.

⁸⁵ See Woodman and Martin 1996, 98, with the ancient *testimonia* there cited.

annihilation like Varus'. The commander Caecina's dream on the night before a battle shows how much Varus lingers in his consciousness:

ducemque terruit dira quies: nam Quinctilium Varum sanguine oblitum et paludibus emersum cernere et audire visus est velut vocantem, non tamen obsecutus et manum intendentis reppulisse. (*Ann.* 1.65.2)

(A dire dream terrified the general: for he imagined that he saw and heard Quinctilius Varus, smeared with blood and rising out of the swamps, as if calling him; but Caecina did not follow him, and pushed away his hand as he stretched it forward.)

During the visit to Teutoburg, Caecina was sent into the area in advance of Germanicus and the rest of the troops to prepare the way by scouting for any Germans lying in ambush and to prepare bridges and causeways to enable the rest of the army to progress through the marshy ground (1.61.1). Tacitus' description of Caecina's activities emphasizes the treacherousness of this swampy terrain, making it unsurprising that Caecina should now be having nightmares about the swamps of this threatening landscape (*paludibus emersum*; cf. 1.61.1 *umido paludum*). The dream likewise corresponds to Tiberius' concern that the sight of Varus' unburied legions (1.62.2 *exercitum imagine caesorum insepultorumque*) would lead the living troops to be more afraid of the Germans (*formidolosiores hostium*) in their subsequent campaigns. These twin factors of the sight of a deceased member of Varus' army (1.65.2 *cernere*) and the resulting fear (*ducemque terruit dira quies*) are in fact played out in Caecina's dream.

It is unclear, however, what the dream actually means and whether it is meant to be read as the output of Caecina's overtaxed imagination or as a predictive sign, a supernatural vision sent by a god as a warning of disasters to come. Nothing in Tacitus' language explicitly marks the dream as predictive; certainly it is possible to see how Caecina's recent activities in the Teutoburg Forest could have taken their psychological toll on him, but this also is not explicitly mentioned. The question seems to be left open.⁸⁶ Even the language in which the dream is described is strange: *dira quies* ("rest that inspires terror") is oxymoronic, and *manum* is unusual in being the object of both *intendentis* and *reppulisse*.⁸⁷ If the dream is intended as some kind of message, it is also not clear what dream-Varus wants from Caecina: is he crying for help or vengeance (which Caecina, in shaking off the phantom's hand, refuses to grant), or summoning Caecina to join him in the underworld (which he refuses to do)?

⁸⁶ *Dira quies* is an allusion to Lucan's description of Pompey's dream before the battle of Pharsalus (Luc. 7.7–28), where Lucan does not definitively indicate whether Pompey's dream is generated internally or externally (Pelling 1997, 207; see also Pelling 1999, 343 on a simultaneous allusion to Livy's Decius [7.34–7]).

⁸⁷ Maurand and Monbrun 1976, 85; see also Leeman 1963, 350.

If the second interpretation is correct (which seems more likely given *non . . . obsecutus*), the dream is ultimately borne out in the battle that follows. Although Caecina is the only one to whom Varus appears, the rest of his army is affected by similar fear, intensified by harsh conditions, particularly the marshy terrain. At first, that fear almost leads to disaster, as Tiberius had predicted: part of the marching column deserts its position “out of fear or defiance” (*Ann.* 1.65.3 *metu an contumacia*) in its eagerness to get out of the horrible marshes on to solid ground (*capto propere campo umentia ultra*).⁸⁸ When the Romans become stuck in a patch of wet, muddy ground like that from which Varus emerged in Caecina’s dream, Arminius has his German troops attack them repeatedly shouting (*clamitans*) a war cry: “Lo! Varus and legions conquered by the same fate!” (1.65.4 “*en Varus [et] eodemque iterum fato vinctae legiones!*”). The battle line falls into confusion, and the swampiness of the ground again plays a role, making the terrain dangerously slippery for the warhorses (1.65.5) and preventing the *aquillae* from being planted into the earth (1.65.5). Varus’ fate, it seems, will be visited upon this army, too: “The present and past merge into one . . . and the battle seems to be going the way of its predecessor.”⁸⁹ The swamps cause yet more misery after the battle is over when the troops must attempt to make a cold, waterlogged camp for the night amongst “funereal shadows,” contemplating their own impending demise on the morrow (1.65.7 *funestas tenebras et tot hominum milibus unum iam reliquum diem lamentabantur*), and Caecina can scarcely keep his terrified troops from desertion (1.66).

However, just as in the dream Caecina manages to shake off Varus’ bloody hand trying to drag him into the swamp, the next day his troops fight successfully against the Germans (*Ann.* 1.67–8). Their newfound success is exemplified in their own battle cries, trumping the Germans’ cry: “Straight away with shouting and an attack they surround the Germans’ rear, calling out by way of reproach that here there were neither woods nor swamps, but level terrain, favorable gods” (1.68.3 *exim clamore et impetu tergis Germanorum circumfunduntur, exprobrantes non hic silvas nec paludes, sed aequis locis aequos deos*). They have literally emerged from the swamps where Varus met his end,⁹⁰ just as they have metaphorically escaped his fate. Arminius’ war cry, suggesting that Caecina’s dream was indeed a harbinger of repeated disaster, seems at first to corroborate Tiberius’ fear at 1.62.2, but neither the dream nor the battle stopped there, as O’Gorman notes: “The success of the campaign, intended to wipe out the memory of Varus, can be seen to be prefigured in the apparition smeared with blood (*sanguine oblitum*), which appears as a sign both of the previous disaster, smeared with Roman blood, and of the subsequent reversal, erased with German blood.”⁹¹ The ambiguous nature of

⁸⁸ See Goodyear 1981, 115 for the complex layout of the terrain in this episode.

⁸⁹ Woodman 1988, 174.

⁹⁰ Woodman 1988, 175.

⁹¹ O’Gorman 2000, 54.

Caecina's dream is thus a good match for the battle that follows, noteworthy in comparison to other military narratives in the *Annals* for its many twists and turns.⁹² Yet although Caecina's Romans win in the end, on another level there is still a lack of closure. If we consider the possibility that dream-Varus was calling to Caecina for aid or vengeance, despite the success of this particular battle, the campaign will ultimately fail to respond to that call, because Tiberius recalls Germanicus before the war can be completed.⁹³ Perhaps Caecina, in shaking off Varus' hand, only leaves him to sink uneasily back into the swamp and await another opportunity for vengeance.

This dream, therefore, the first in the *Annals*, is surrounded by ambiguity. Its precise meaning remains unclear, as does the question of whether it was sent by the gods. And while there are strong indications that Caecina's dream and his troops' subsequent fear in Varus' swamps corroborate Tiberius' objection to the burial in Teutoburg on grounds of morale, the fact that Caecina's troops are able to rally and win a victory perhaps suggests that Tiberius was being overly cautious. The focus is on ambiguity: supernatural signs such as dreams will always be difficult to read and subject to different interpretations.

The ambiguities inherent in dreams, and the consequences that interpreting such signs can have in the world of the principate, are felt even more strongly when Tacitus returns to Germanicus' activities in *Annals* 2. As we saw from the narrative of the German mutiny, Germanicus is particularly prone to framing the conflict between Romans and Germans in religious terms. In *Annals* 2, we see him displaying a similarly theatrical and hasty tendency in his interpretation of signs. If Tacitus uses Caecina's dream to show us that messages from the gods are fraught with ambiguity, he uses Germanicus' handling of similar communications to emphasize his carelessness in handling the supernatural. Interwoven with Germanicus' response to signs and his use of religious rhetoric is the specter of further conflict with Tiberius, indicating that much is at stake socially and politically for Germanicus' status as a rival interpreter of religious phenomena.

Tacitus takes care to show that Germanicus still behaves much as he did during the suppression of the mutiny in *Annals* 1: his problematic rhetoric of pollution, sacrifice, and expiation still resonates among his men even after the terrors of the swamps of Teutoburg. When Germanicus creeps out in disguise to spy on his own troops, he hears them speak familiar words: in addition to praising their commander, they express their desire to punish the Germans: "Those traitors and breakers of the peace, they said, must be sacrificed to vengeance and glory" (*Ann.* 2.13.1 *perfidus et ruptores pacis ultioni et gloriae mactandos*). Germanicus had earlier reprimanded his troops for their irreligious

⁹² On Caecina's campaign, see Levene 2009, 232–3.

⁹³ *Ann.* 1.55.1, 2.26.2–5, with §1.6.

mutiny (1.42.2 *fas gentium rupistis*), and the soldiers now apply similar terms to the Germans who betrayed Varus before the fateful slaughter.⁹⁴ The *ultio* and *gloria* that were important in Germanicus' appeal to these same troops during the mutiny (1.43.1, 3) return, now strikingly personified,⁹⁵ suggesting that the soldiers view these entities almost as divinities to whom the Germans will be sacrificed. Tacitus uses *mactare* elsewhere to describe offering a blood sacrifice to a god, for example, the Germans' slaughter of Varus' soldiers in their barbaric rites (1.61.3 *mactaverant*).⁹⁶ The sentiment of vengeance is exactly what Germanicus would have wished, but the sacrificial language draws a problematic parallel between the slaughter his soldiers wish to inflict and the grisly human sacrifice at Teutoburg. They interpret as an omen (2.13.3 *accipere omen*) the Latin-speaking German soldier who comes at that moment (*inter quae*) to canvass for deserters. Tacitus does not indicate whether their interpretation is reasonable or open to criticism, but the timing of the "omen" suggests that the religious fervor of their sacrifice metaphor has the troops interpreting non-supernatural occurrences as supernatural. Adopting Germanicus' sacrificial rhetoric now leads his troops into problematic interpretations.

Just as Tacitus offered descriptions of both Blaesus and Germanicus in the two mutiny narratives to show two different models for how commanders can play upon their troops' religious predispositions, his description of Germanicus' dream and his response invites comparison with Caecina. Germanicus' dream is a happier version of Caecina's *dira quies* (*Ann.* 1.65.2):

Nox eadem laetam Germanico quietem tulit, viditque se operatum et sanguine sacro respersa praetexta pulchriorem aliam manibus aviae Augustae accepisse. auctus omine, addicentibus auspiciis, vocat contionem et quae sapientia provisa aptaque imminenti pugnae disserit. (2.14.1)

provisa Gron.: praevisa M

(The same night brought Germanicus a happy dream: he saw that he had performed a sacrifice and, his purple-bordered robe spattered with sacred blood, received another more beautiful one from the hands of his grandmother Augusta. Increased by the omen, and with the auspices propitious, he summoned an assembly and discussed the precautions he had taken in his wisdom, and things which were favorable for imminent fighting.)

Tacitus states that the dream is a happy one (*laeta*), a term used elsewhere of omens signifying success in the future, and it seems to be corroborated by

⁹⁴ See Goodyear 1981, 220. Cf. Segestes' reference to Arminius as "the violator of your treaty with Varus" (*Ann.* 1.58.2 *violatorem foederis vestri . . . apud Varum*).

⁹⁵ Koestermann 1963, 277; Goodyear 1981, 220.

⁹⁶ On *mactare*, see Palmer 1954, 66–7. Tacitus uses the verb elsewhere only at *Ann.* 4.52.2 (sacrifices to *divus Augustus*); compare *commaculare* at *Ann.* 1.39.4, where human sacrifice is also implied.

favorable auspices taken the next morning.⁹⁷ Certain aspects of the dream's content indeed seem positive, especially in light of Germanicus' situation. The sacrificial imagery could be interpreted as a precursor of good things to come, as Pelling suggests: "Might not that initial sacrifice and spattered blood point to the earlier reverses and losses, and suggest that they indeed constituted a 'sacrifice,' playing an ordered part in the wider scheme of things by preparing for this 'finer' future?"⁹⁸ This resonates with the troops' use of sacrificial imagery, and, in this light, a dream of being spattered with sacrificial blood could indicate that the army's upcoming clashes with the Germans will have good results for Germanicus. Yet Livia is not a straightforwardly positive figure: although giving Germanicus a clean toga seems to be a positive action, Germanicus is aware that Livia secretly hates him (1.33.1 *anxius occultis in se patruī aviaequē odiis*, "[Germanicus was] anxious due to the hidden hatreds of his uncle and grandmother against him").⁹⁹ If the clean toga is a sign of future success, the fact that it is being granted by Livia reminds the reader of Germanicus' dependence on his family members for any recognition of his successes. Livia was instrumental in Tiberius' accession (1.5.3–4) and, as we will learn only later, in putting Tiberius in his position of power over Germanicus by ensuring that Augustus did not adopt Germanicus (4.57.3). Tacitus has told us that Tiberius intends to use that position of power to remove Germanicus from Germany, his arena of military success,¹⁰⁰ so Livia's presence in the dream could symbolize the limits to Germanicus' success that are imposed by the very institution of the principate, as will become even clearer later in Tacitus' narrative, when Tiberius recalls Germanicus to Rome to celebrate his triumph (2.26).¹⁰¹

Furthermore, again, as with Caecina's dream, Tacitus does not indicate whether Germanicus' dream is predictive of the future at all, leaving it an open question as to whether it was sent by the gods or merely manifests Germanicus' own psychological preoccupations. Tacitus gives weight to the dream's psychological impact: Germanicus is inspired by it to give his troops

⁹⁷ Pelling 1997, 208. On *laetus*, see OLD s.v. *laetus* 6, TLL 7.2.888, and cf. *Hist.* 1.3.2, with Shannon 2014, 276. *Addicentibus auspiciis* recalls a technical term usually applied to the birds themselves (Goodyear 1981, 222), used only here by Tacitus (Koestermann 1963, 278).

⁹⁸ Pelling 1997, 207–8. Dreaming about performing sacrifice is considered a good omen if the items sacrificed are appropriate to the gods involved (Artem. *Oneir.* 2.33).

⁹⁹ Cf. Pelling 1997, 208. Dreaming of Livia performing a kindness could be interpreted either as a good or a bad sign: Artemidorus observes that dreaming of "relatives born before one's parents" signifies a good outcome "if they should do or say something good or pleasant or delightful (τι ἀγαθὸν ἢ ἡδὺ ἢ κεχαρισμένον)" (*Oneir.* 3.27, trans. Harris-McCoy 2012, 273), but dreaming of any person who is or has ever been hostile to the dreamer foretells a bad outcome (*Oneir.* 4.6).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Pelling 1997, 208.

¹⁰¹ On the passage, see §1.6, pp. 58–61, and cf. Harrison 2013, 105.

an exhortation for the upcoming battle (*auctus omine*).¹⁰² This is another difference between Germanicus and Caecina: when Caecina dreams of Varus, it does not prompt him to predict victory to his troops. On the face of it, this is logical, given the content of Caecina's dream: certainly no sane commander would tell his already frightened troops he has dreamed of the ghost of Varus trying to drag him down into the marshes. Caecina wisely insulates the troops from the effect of his ambiguous dream; Germanicus, however, ever theatrical and ever hasty, assumes his dream is good and uses it to improve the morale of his troops, although another, negative, significance of the dream is also possible.

Germanicus follows his uncritical interpretation of the dream with familiar religious rhetoric: his subsequent address to his soldiers is reminiscent of his speeches from the mutinies. He continues to emphasize the Germans' irreli-giosity in battle, saying they are "not mindful of divine or human law during success" (*Ann.* 2.14.3 *inter secunda non divini, non humani iuris memores*), omitting the fact that similar things could be said of his Roman troops' destruction of the German shrine (cf. 1.51.1, with similar anaphora and asyndeton in *non sexus, non aetas*, and similar sentiment in *profana simul et sacra*). Germanicus' obsession with imitating the precedent of his father Drusus continues, too: he has recently prayed to Drusus during the mutinies (1.43.3) and before setting sail on the *fossa Drusiana* (2.8.1),¹⁰³ and he again recalls his father in the aftermath of his dream: "The Elbe (he said) was now nearer than the Rhine, and there would be no war beyond it, provided only that they should set him up as victor in the same lands, treading the footsteps of his father and his uncle" (2.14.4 *propiores iam Albim quam Rhenum neque bellum ultra, modo se patris patruisque vestigia prementem isdem in terris victorem sisterent*). The rhetoric of memory and monumentality is strong here, with Germanicus asking himself to be "set up" (*sisterent*) as if he were a commemorative statue.¹⁰⁴ The landscape through which Germanicus travels is filled with markers of Drusus' presence; fuelled perhaps by the enthusiasm of his dream, he eagerly desires similar glories for himself. Mentioning Drusus alongside the Elbe, however, exhibits a striking tone-deafness. Drusus was famously turned back from crossing that river by the apparition of a larger-than-life woman and died shortly thereafter (Dio 55.1, Suet. *Claud.* 12.1).¹⁰⁵ Yet Germanicus blithely compares Tiberius' successes in the region with Drusus' chastisement by the gods, failure, and death; given the nature of his

¹⁰² Cf. Tacitus' description of Titus as *aucto animo* ("with heightened spirits") after his visit to the oracular shrine of Venus at Paphos (*Hist.* 2.4.2, with Shannon 2014, 279–80).

¹⁰³ Note examples of prayer language in the passage: *precor* followed by an *ut*-clause, the "technical verb *iuvare*", and the adjective *libens* (Hickson 1993a, 47–8, 77–8, 101).

¹⁰⁴ Woodman 2015, 263.

¹⁰⁵ On the story, see Gruen 1990, 405–6.

father's demise, Germanicus perhaps ought to have paid particular attention to the elements of his own dream that could be read as presaging disaster.

Yet the bird sign which follows corroborates his optimism: "Meanwhile there was a most beautiful augury: eight eagles that seemed to make for the woods and enter them drew the attention of the commander. He shouted that they were to go and follow the Roman birds, the legions' own divinities" (*Ann.* 2.17.2 *interea pulcherrimum augurium, octo aquilae petere silvas et intrare visae imperatorem advertere. exclamat irent, sequerentur Romanas avis, propria legionum numina*). Tacitus calls the event an *augurium*, giving no indication that there was any doubt about the sign's predictive value; indeed, once Germanicus as commander has received the bird sign and announced it as a good one, this can no longer be a matter for discussion.¹⁰⁶ The eagles, as the birds that adorn the sacred Roman standards, certainly qualify as the Romans' own *numina*,¹⁰⁷ and the fact that they enter the woods, the Germans' domain, indicates that the Romans are to beat the Germans on their own terrain. This, in fact, is what miraculously (2.17.3 *mirumque dictu*) happens in the subsequent battle, in contrast to the role that Germany's fearsome terrain has played in confounding Roman efforts previously.¹⁰⁸ Germanicus again shows himself a master of manipulating his troops. He swiftly capitalizes on the omen (indicated by the asyndeton of *exclamat*), reflecting his theatrical nature. Such troop-manipulation can be characteristic of a good commander,¹⁰⁹ and in this case Germanicus' interpretation turns out to be correct, and a Roman victory results. But Tacitus' characterization of Germanicus may give the reader reservations about the haste with which he responds to the bird sign, especially in view of his assumptions about his dream as a positive sign. Furthermore, the troops' readiness to accept Germanicus' interpretation of the omen was hardly a foregone conclusion: the armies in Germany did not respect the *numina* of their eagles during the mutinies, which Germanicus seems not to have considered when appealing to their devotion to the *aquilae*.

Germanicus may not be well suited to doing the careful thinking that is required to understand dreams, signs, and ritual pollution, but it is also true that he is limited on all fronts by Tiberius, and by the principate in general. While Germanicus' interpretation of his dream as a good sign is proved correct in the short term by his troops' success, the reader knows that in the long term things will not turn out as well for him: with hindsight, the sinister

¹⁰⁶ Livy 10.40 provides an example of falsified auspices which, once they are announced, must nevertheless be accepted as true; see Linderski 1993, 60–1, and Oakley 2005b, 409–10 for other examples.

¹⁰⁷ Rüpke 1990, 187 n. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Levene 2009, 236.

¹⁰⁹ See this chapter, n. 18. Cf. the different reactions to Julius Caesar's ability to "spin" his stumbling on the shores of Africa as a good omen (Suet. *Iul.* 59; Frontin. *Str.* 1.12.2; Dio 42.58.2–4). Compare Scipio's similar cleverness in manipulating his troops (Livy 26.45.9, with Levene 1993, 61–2).

implications of his Livia dream become evident. In the shorter term, too, Germanicus is deprived of the chance to memorialize his achievements:¹¹⁰

Laudatis pro contione victoribus Caesar congeriem armorum struxit, superbo cum titulo: “debellatis inter Rhenum Albimque nationibus exercitum Tiberii Caesaris ea monimenta Marti et Iovi et Augusto sacravisse.” de se nihil addidit, metu invidiae an ratus conscientiam facti satis esse. (*Ann.* 2.22.1)

(After praising the victors in a public meeting, Caesar built a pile of weapons with a bold inscription: “When the nations between the Rhine and the Elbe had been subjugated, the army of Tiberius Caesar dedicated this monument to Mars, Jupiter, and Augustus.” He added nothing about himself, whether out of fear of jealousy or thinking that knowledge of the deed was enough.)

The monument does not preserve Germanicus’ name, but does name two members of the Imperial house: Tiberius, whose army is credited with the victory, and Augustus, one of the gods to whom the *spolia* are offered. This trophy is both a memorial of earthly achievement and the physical marker of a ritual act of piety to the gods; on both levels, the Imperial family benefits. And given Tiberius’ extremely hostile reaction to the burial of Varus’ troops (1.62.2), it is not surprising that *metus invidiae* should give Germanicus pause now, as when he decided not to rebuild the tumulus (2.7.3). In a society where the Imperial house has a monopoly on commemoration (cultic and otherwise) and on the position of *pontifex maximus*, as well as a place in the pantheon, expectations have changed so much that it is possible for Germanicus to believe that *conscientia facti* is the only recognition available to him. The German narrative shows not only Germanicus’ shortcomings, but also the problems surrounding cultic memory in the society in which he finds himself.

2.5 GERMANICUS ABROAD

After Tiberius declares an end to the campaigns along the Rhine, Germanicus’ move to the Eastern part of the empire allows Tacitus to throw into even sharper relief the flaws in his character that make life difficult for him both as a student of the past and as someone who must continue to live in the Imperial present. If anything, that past and present are even more dangerously intertwined in the East than in the West. Germanicus must confront cultural, and cultic, memory at every turn: evidence of past conflict between his own ancestors, battlefields ancient and modern, the ruins of forgotten empires that remind humans that their fates are far from secure, and signs from the gods that Germanicus has earned their displeasure. Throughout, the Germanicus

¹¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of this passage and related issues, see Shannon 2011.

of the German mutinies and the war against Arminius displays his characteristic ignorance. These travels provide an arena for the theatricality that defines Germanicus' interactions with the past, but they also show him continually failing to see the instability of his own position. If cultural memory, especially in the realm of cult practice, is supposed to help humans navigate the tricky waters of fate, prophecy, and other difficult aspects of mortal existence, Germanicus spectacularly fails to understand how knowledge of the past, especially the ritual past, can inform his own life in the present. Although he is steered toward sites pointing to the instability of human existence, Germanicus does not seem to understand the lessons these sites could teach him, which parallels his continued misunderstanding of his relationship with Tiberius. Coupling this with signs of Germanicus' impending demise, and with his own failure to engage in ritual practice at the shrines he visits, Tacitus heightens the atmosphere of foreboding as Germanicus' death approaches, signals the role of Tiberius and the Imperial system in that demise, and also suggests connections between Germanicus' death and his ignorance of the divine.

Germanicus' first stop on his trip to the Eastern provinces is in a momentous location: Actium. Germanicus begins his consulship for the year AD 18 in Nicopolis (*Ann.* 2.53.1). Entering the office outside Rome was unusual; this highlights the strange circumstances in which Germanicus finds himself as Tiberius has granted him a "consolation prize" triumph and sent him on a journey that will end in his death.¹¹¹ Seeing the sights of Actium causes Germanicus to think of the past:

sinus Actiaca victoria inclutos et sacratas ab Augusto manubias castraque Antonii cum recordatione maiorum suorum adiit. namque ei, ut memoravi, avunculus Augustus, avus Antonius erant, magnaue illic imago tristium laetorumque.

(2.53.2)

(He approached the gulfs made famous by the Actian victory, and the spoils sanctified by Augustus, and the camp of Antony, with reminiscence of his ancestors. For (as I have reported) Augustus was his great-uncle and Antony his grandfather, and great was the image of sad and happy things in that place.)

The landscape Germanicus views is marked by dedications to the gods that memorialize the battle of Actium, as well as by the victor Octavian's ritual activity in its aftermath. The *manubiae* which Octavian dedicated to the gods consisted of an impressive victory monument, dedicated to Neptune and Mars and built on the site where he had camped before the fateful battle.¹¹² The contrast between

¹¹¹ Cf. Ginsburg 1981, 77 on how the narrative of AD 18 "prepar[es] the way for Germanicus' death."

¹¹² For Octavian's campsite as the site of the later shrine/memorial, see Suet. *Aug.* 18.2 and 96.2; Plut. *Ant.* 65.3; and Dio 51.1.3, with Murray and Petsas 1989, 9–12. On the remains of the memorial, including the rams from Antony's captured warships, see Babcock 1962, 31; Pelling 1988, 323; Murray and Petsas 1989, 85–93.

the site of Octavian's camp, which has become an impressive dedication to the gods, and Antony's, which has remained an adjectiveless *castra*, is striking; the victor memorializes himself with a ritual act, while the loser is deprived of such an opportunity. Such dedications by victorious generals are an important part of the long history of Romans maintaining a relationship with their gods,¹¹³ a process from which Antony is excluded, as other non-members of the Imperial family will be after him.¹¹⁴ Antony's camps have apparently left behind some physical traces for Germanicus to see, but he could only leave a camp, while Augustus has left a shrine; although Antony has not entirely been erased from memory,¹¹⁵ the disparity in their commemorations is clear.

The unequal memories on display at Actium are highly relevant for Germanicus' own personal situation, particularly regarding the memorialization of victories. The phrase *imago tristium laetorumque* emphasizes the role of the visual in communicating a lesson from the past at Nicopolis, recalling the effect of the sight of Varus' legions' remains on the builders of the tumulus at Teutoburg (*Ann.* 1.62.2 *imagine caesorum insepultorumque*). But a secondary meaning of *imago* as an ancestor's death mask¹¹⁶ may also come into play, since Tacitus is talking about Germanicus' ancestors. *Imagines* typically are a source of pride and inspire descendants to deeds of glory rivaling those of their ancestors.¹¹⁷ Yet in the post-Augustan world, that is not an option for Germanicus. Augustus' impressive *spolia*, a momentous dedication to the gods, invite comparison with Germanicus' recent dedication of spoils (2.22.1), inferior in every way: a pile of German weapons (whose quality Germanicus himself deprecated, 2.14.2–3), and an act of worship which according to the inscription on the monument was not even performed by Germanicus himself, directed to a set of gods that includes the same Augustus whose vastly more impressive dedication is commemorated at Actium (2.22.1). Furthermore, since Tiberius recalled him from Germany before he could gain further victory, Germanicus has little hope of emulating Augustus' *manubiae*. If the *imago* of Actium is meant to inspire Germanicus to emulate the deeds of his ancestors, his *spolia* by their nature place him in Antony's role rather than Augustus', since they indicate his subservience to Augustus' heir.

¹¹³ Compare Tacitus' outrage when dedicated spoils of war are removed from temples to finance the rebuilding of Rome after the fire under Nero (*Ann.* 15.45.1; cf. 15.41.1, with Shannon 2012, 759–60; see also §7.6, pp. 323–4).

¹¹⁴ See Orlin 1997, 130 on the changed nature of manubial dedications within the city of Rome under Augustus. See also §1.6, pp. 61–3 on the temple of Saturn.

¹¹⁵ On the complex question of memory sanctions applied to Antony, see Plut. *Ant.* 86.9; Cic. 49.6; Dio 51.19.3; Pelling 1988, 323; Reinhold 1988, 147; Flower 2006, 116–21. *Ann.* 3.18.1 suggests that Tacitus was unaware of any long-term sanctions against Antony's memory (see Woodman and Martin 1996, 187).

¹¹⁶ OLD s.v. *imago* 2.

¹¹⁷ e.g. Sall. *Iug.* 4.6. See Flower 1996, 220–1; Grethlein 2006, 136–40.

Other people around Germanicus have also noticed the role that the memories of Augustus and Antony play in his life, as Tacitus notes. He has mentioned it before in connection with the partisanship surrounding Germanicus and Drusus: “The alienation from his uncle had increased love for Germanicus among the rest, and also because he was superior in the renown of his mother’s line, having M. Antonius as his grandfather and Augustus as his great-uncle” (*Ann.* 2.43.5 *Germanico alienatio patruī amorem apud ceteros auxerat, et quia claritudine mater<ni> generis anteibat, avum M. Antonium, avunculum Augustum ferens*). Germanicus’ descent from both Antony and Augustus, opponents at the battle of Actium, makes some see him as a better candidate for the throne than Drusus, and is thus, Tacitus implies, a large part of why Tiberius redeploys him from Germany to the East.¹¹⁸ Germanicus has displayed a near obsession with his own ancestry, too, through his repeated invocations of his father Drusus (1.33, 2.8.1, 2.14.4); even so, until the visit to Actium, Germanicus has not evidently considered other members of his family tree. Indeed, it is unclear how much the issues that Tacitus highlights at Actium (the dedication of spoils and the dangers of ancestry) affect Germanicus himself. The phrases *imago tristium laetorumque* and *cum recordatione maiorum suorum* are focalized through Germanicus and indicate his engagement in the act of remembering and his acknowledgment of the Actian motif of winners and losers; but the reader receives no indication that Germanicus notes the relevance of these concepts to his own situation. He seems as unmoved at Actium as he and Drusus were in Rome: despite the ancestry-related talk surrounding them, the brothers were “unshaken by the quarrels of their relatives” (2.43.6 *proximorum certaminibus inconcussi*). This may indicate that they laudably maintained concord, or perhaps that they buried their heads in the sand.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Germanicus’ decision to visit Actium is not even deliberate. Battlefields were popular tourist destinations in antiquity,¹²⁰ but Germanicus visits only by accident:¹²¹ he has been visiting Drusus in Dalmatia on the way to his new Eastern command when bad weather forces him to land at Actium (*Ann.* 2.53.1–2). He only visits the site of the battle while his ships are being rebuilt (2.53.2 *simul*), presumably as a way of killing time. So not only does Germanicus fail to learn the proper lessons from Actium, but he did not even actively choose to go there. Contrast the stop at Actium with Germanicus’ evidently deliberate visit to Athens (2.53.3), where recalling the past has a very different function: “The Greeks received him with the choicest honors, giving utterance to the ancient words and deeds of their own people, so that their flattery would have more repute” (2.53.3 *excepere Graeci quaesitissimis*

¹¹⁸ See Furneaux 1896, 337 on *namque* (*Ann.* 2.43.5).

¹²⁰ Casson 1994, 236.

¹²¹ Gissel 2001, 291.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Pelling 1993, 73–4.

honoribus, vetera suorum facta dictaque praeferentes quo plus dignationis adulatio haberet). Antony and Augustus are both known to have spent time in Athens before and after the battle of Actium,¹²² but the Athenians, to enhance the quality of their *adulatio*, recall only their more savory ancient past, omitting the decidedly negative detail, which Piso later raises, of Athens' support for Antony against *divus Augustus* (2.55.1). If Germanicus had not been taken to Actium by forces outside his control, it might have been possible for him to overlook memorials of the more recent (and relevant) past in the part of the world he is now visiting, and to limit himself to the whitewashed history peddled to him by *adulatio*-driven Athenians. Actium's reminders, foisted upon him by the weather, are certainly timely, but it is unclear how receptive Germanicus is to them.

Forces outside Germanicus' control dictate further visits to sites with important resonances for Germanicus. After stopping at Lesbos (where Agrippina gives birth to Julia), Perinthus, Byzantium, and the mouth of the Black Sea, driven by a mixture of touristic curiosity and administrative duties (*Ann.* 2.54.1), Germanicus arrives at Troy and then at Colophon. But these were not his first intended ports of call:

atque illum in regressu sacra Samothracum visere nitentem obvii aquilones depulere. igitur a<dito I>lio quaeque ibi varietate fortunae et nostri origine veneranda, relegit Asiam adpellitque Colophona, ut Clarii Apollinis oraculo uteretur. (2.54.2)

(And as he was striving to go and view the holy rites of the Samothracians on his return [from the Black Sea], the north winds confronted him and pushed him off course. Therefore, after approaching Ilium and the things there which are to be revered because of the changeability of fortune and our own origin, he sailed back along the coast of Asia and put in at Colophon to consult the oracle of Clarian Apollo.)

Germanicus' intention was probably to be initiated into the mysteries of the Great Gods, a common practice for Roman visitors to Samothrace.¹²³ Yet, just as at Actium, the weather prevents Germanicus from approaching his intended destination; since the Samothracian gods were known for protecting initiates from bad weather and disaster at sea,¹²⁴ the reader might wonder whether the storm that prevents Germanicus from landing has something cosmic behind it. The gods, perhaps, are denying Germanicus that protection in attempting to keep him away from the island and its mysteries,¹²⁵ which were known

¹²² App. *B Civ.* 5.30; Plut. *Ant.* 68.6; Habicht 1997, 359–65.

¹²³ For epigraphic evidence for Roman initiates at Samothrace, see Cole 1984, 97–100; Cole 1989, 1580–8; Reeder 1992, 288–90; Reynolds and Gordon 2003, 224–5; Wescoat 2013, 58–63.

¹²⁴ See Lewis 1959, nos. 226–33, 237–8; Cole 1984, 2.

¹²⁵ So Val. Flacc. 2.434–6 (see n. 128).

in antiquity for refusing to admit the impure (particularly murderers).¹²⁶ If Germanicus' bad weather is read as a sign that the gods wish to keep him away from Samothrace, what exactly has Germanicus done wrong that would have angered them so much? While Germanicus does not have the ritual pollution of a murderer like Livy's Perseus (45.5.1–6.11), his complicity in the massacres perpetrated by his troops in Germany, fuelled by the rhetoric of expiation that Germanicus attaches to their situation, might be seen as religiously problematic.¹²⁷ It might also be Germanicus' general ineptitude in religious matters (engaging with the gods only in rhetoric, interpreting dreams uncritically, reacting theatrically to signs) that could be thought to unsettle the gods. Valerius Flaccus indicates that it is not ritual uncleanness, but a lack of trustworthiness, that might cause the gods of Samothrace to prevent someone from landing on the island: initiates are prevented from revealing the nature of the mysteries, and so storms are sent to keep away "untrustworthy sailors" (Val. Flacc. 2.436 *infidos* . . . *nautas*).¹²⁸ Perhaps Germanicus might have been considered untrustworthy,¹²⁹ given his problematic interactions with the divine. Tacitus does not say explicitly that supernatural forces prevent Germanicus from landing at Samothrace, but this is now the second time that bad weather has directed him either toward or away from a significant site. With the winds sending Germanicus toward Actium and away from a shrine with a mystery cult that protects its initiates from disaster, the reader (who also knows that Germanicus will die on this Eastern journey) may feel that metaphorical dark clouds are also gathering over Germanicus' head to accompany the literal bad weather he encounters.

Repulse from Samothrace provides the impetus (*igitur*; cf. *Ann.* 2.53.2) for Germanicus to visit Troy. It was popular with Roman tourists,¹³⁰ but for Germanicus the city is a decidedly second-choice destination, and his time there is described briefly in an ablative absolute. The phrase *varietas fortunae* suggests that Troy ought to remind the visitor that some things are subject to *fortuna* and outside the control of mankind,¹³¹ and *veneranda* implies that a worshipful attitude is appropriate when confronted with such a powerful

¹²⁶ See Plut. *Apophthegmata Laconica* 217c–d, 229d, 236d, with Cole 1989, 1577. There is some evidence for priests in the sanctuary who specialized in cleansing murderers (Lewis 1959, no. 239, and cf. Parker 1983, 374 n. 29).

¹²⁷ For the ritual problem presented by misguided attempts to purify oneself via killing, cf. Sil. *Pun.* 12.283–4, on Hannibal, with Lennon 2014, 124.

¹²⁸ On the interpretation of *infidos*, see Lewis 1959, 106 n. b; Harper Smith 1988, 187.

¹²⁹ Cf. Poortvliet 1991, 235.

¹³⁰ Casson 1994, 256–7.

¹³¹ *Anth. Lat.* 708 and *Anth. Pal.* 9.387, if written by Germanicus (on their disputed authorship, see Page 1981, 559–60), reflect awareness of *varietas fortunae*: both poems note that the Romans now hold territory which their defeated ancestors the Trojans had lost. Woodman 2015, 256 n. 3 thinks it unlikely that Tacitus was aware of Germanicus' poems; if Tacitus knew of them, deliberately choosing not to mention them is part of his portrayal of Germanicus as an impassive viewer of ancient sites.

force. The Julio-Claudian line's Trojan credentials give added point to the phrase *nostri origine*: is this kinship with Romans in general, or with Rome's emperors in particular?¹³² In addition to the Homeric attractions of the site, there would have been many statues of Augustus and his heirs, including Tiberius, visible to Germanicus in the city of Ilium;¹³³ the "origin" (*origo*) celebrated there is above all that of the Imperial house, and Germanicus might well wonder about his own "changeability of fortune" under the current Julian *princeps*. Yet we are given no explicit indication that he makes these connections:¹³⁴ Tacitus only says that these things are "to be venerated" (*veneranda*), not that Germanicus does venerate them.

At Germanicus' next stop, Colophon,¹³⁵ we see further indications of the doom-laden atmosphere that surrounds him, and also of his troubling disconnection from the sites he visits:

non femina illic, ut apud Delphos, sed certis e familiis et ferme Mileto accitus sacerdos numerum modo consultantium et nomina audit; tum in specum degressus, hausta fontis arcani aqua, ignarus plerumque litterarum et carminum edit responsa versibus compositis super rebus quas quis mente concepit. et ferebatur Germanico per ambages, ut mos oraculis, maturum exitum cecinisse.

(*Ann.* 2.54.3)

(There [Colophon] it is not a woman, as at Delphi, but a priest summoned from particular families (and usually from Miletus) who hears just the number and names of those making a consultation. Then, going down into a cave, after drinking water from a secret spring, although generally ignorant of letters and poetry he pronounces a response in well-ordered verses about the matters which anyone has conceived in his mind. And he was said to have prophesied a timely exit for Germanicus—ambiguously, as is the custom of oracles.)

Tacitus' description of the oracle combines a keen interest in the details of ritual practice at the site with a pervasive ambiguity that enhances its mysterious quality, and also the sense of uncertainty surrounding Germanicus himself. We are given fairly precise information (ancestry, home town, level of education) about the priest who serves as the god's mouthpiece, yet even there some ambiguity remains. Familial priesthoods are usually a mark of social prestige, and it seems quite unlikely that any elite man from Miletus in the first century AD would have been illiterate; indeed, there are indications that the Hellenistic poet Nicander, who hardly counts as "ignorant of letters and

¹³² Erskine 2001, 245.

¹³³ Erskine 2001, 251–2.

¹³⁴ Compare Lucan's account of Caesar's visit to Troy: he walks over famous Homeric sites in blithe ignorance (9.974 *inscius*) until a local guide tells him what he is seeing (9.976–9). Troy is venerable here, too (9.987 *veneranda vetustas*). See Bartsch 1997, 134.

¹³⁵ On Germanicus' connection with this shrine, see Ovid *Fast.* 1.19–20, with Fantham 1985, 249. See Randén 2013, 186 for epigraphical evidence of Germanicus' travels near Claros.

poetry,” served as a priest of Apollo at Claros.¹³⁶ The mechanics of divine inspiration are also left implicit. Tacitus merely says that the *sacerdos* descends into the cave, drinks the water, and prophesies, without stating that the water is responsible for the creation of a trance-like or prophetic state as explicitly as other authors do.¹³⁷ Furthermore, the very procedure by which this oracle is consulted lends itself to ambiguity. Since those who consult the oracle are not supposed to verbalize the question they wish to ask,¹³⁸ the reader is given no indication of what knowledge Germanicus wants to receive from the oracle. Is he afraid for his health and asking the god about his prognosis?¹³⁹ Or is it possible he has more general doubts about his future, given his recent conflicts with Tiberius, particularly his banishment from the German arena for military success and glory? The oracle’s answer is also shrouded in mystery: *maturum* could signify either “occurring at the proper time” or “occurring before the proper time.”¹⁴⁰ Germanicus will either die early, or not—not a terribly informative message from Apollo. Nor is the oracle’s response straightforwardly publicized: *ferebatur* implies not that Germanicus himself revealed the content of Apollo’s prediction, but that it leaked out somehow in popular talk. Germanicus’ consultation of the oracle is therefore surrounded by ambiguity: we do not know how this priest is illiterate, how the water contributes to the oracular process, what Germanicus asked, or what the response actually meant.

Tacitus elsewhere adopts a similar language of ambiguity when describing strange cults, especially those located in the Eastern Mediterranean: Titus’ visit to the shrine of Venus on Paphos (*Hist.* 2.3–4) and Vespasian’s consultation of Carmelus in the Levant (*Hist.* 2.78.3–4) show a similar concern with providing a detailed description of ritual practice at these sites (for example, concern with the identities of the hereditary priests), while also emphasizing the shrines’ secrecy and strangeness.¹⁴¹ This is particularly true of the ambiguity inherent in both questions and answers during oracular consultation. For Titus, his question to the oracle was couched in riddles (*Hist.* 2.4.1 *de se per ambages interrogat*). The priest’s answer, while not enumerated in its particulars, is clearly a positive one: “[he saw that] the entrails were propitious and

¹³⁶ Nic. *Alex.* 9; *Vita Nicandri in schol. Ther.*; Goodyear 1981, 359; Levin 1989, 1624 n. 88, 1630. The religious specialists at Claros (on which see Lampinen 2013, 61–71) all came from distinguished families and were almost certainly not illiterate; Tacitus was probably drawing on Delphic practice, since the Pythia was said to be illiterate (Lampinen 2013, 62).

¹³⁷ Pliny *HN* 2.232; Iambl. *Myst.* 3.11.

¹³⁸ This style of consultation is borne out by surviving oracles: nearly all contain just the god’s response, without the consulter’s question (Levin 1989, 1631).

¹³⁹ So Levin 1989, 1630.

¹⁴⁰ Woodman 2015, 256 n. 4.

¹⁴¹ On Paphian Venus, see Shannon 2014, 278–80. On Carmelus, see Ash 2007a, 304–6. For ambiguity in oracles, see Randén 2013, 181–2.

appropriate, and that the goddess favored great plans" (*Hist.* 2.4.2 *laeta et congruentia exta magnisque consultis adnuere deam*). Vespasian's question for the god is not revealed (we are merely told that "he was turning over hidden hopes in his mind," *Hist.* 2.78.3 *spes occultas versaret animo*), but the priest's response, while typically ambiguous (*Hist.* 2.78.4 *ambages*), is again clearly positive. Germanicus' situation, while similar, differs in two key respects. The Flavians had clear Imperial ambitions, whereas Germanicus does not, as Tacitus has made sure to tell us (*Ann.* 1.34.1). Yet this denial has made little difference to his popularity, which the oracle only intensifies: *ferebatur* indicates it was important enough to set people talking.¹⁴² Furthermore, Germanicus is the only consulter of oracles whose unclear question receives an equally unclear answer. As Germanicus has progressed further east, he has been systematically rejected by the gods. First a storm drove him to Actium, then more bad weather prevented him from becoming an initiate of the Samothracian mysteries and obtaining the gods' promise of protection. Now, when he consults Apollo, divine communication is marked by murkiness and ambiguity: he cannot get a clear answer. This, perhaps, should not surprise us. Germanicus' engagement with the gods throughout *Annals* 1–2 has been characterized by a lack of sincerity. The man who normally prays to the gods only publicly, when he is trying to influence his troops, is now denied a clear answer when he asks a question in private. Germanicus' personal situation has become much more precarious, and at exactly this moment his line of communication with the gods is scrambled by static.

Tacitus also suggests, through allusion, that Germanicus fails to display ritual correctness in his actions during this sojourn at Colophon. Tacitus' description of Germanicus' consultation of the oracle recalls Livy's description of Aemilius Paullus' visits to the oracles of Apollo at Delphi and Jupiter Trophonius at Lebadia during his travels around Greece (*Livy* 45.27.6–8). The verbal similarities between the two visits, and especially Tacitus' mention of Delphi where it is not strictly necessary (cf. *Livy* 45.27.6 *Delphos*), indicate that he wishes the reader to think of this Livian episode.¹⁴³ Both men are motivated to undertake their visits out of a desire for knowledge of the famous and ancient sites of the Greek East.¹⁴⁴ Both Jupiter Trophonius and Apollo Clarius are consulted by descending into caves (*Livy* 45.27.8 *os specus, per quod oraculo utentes sciscitatum deos descendunt*, "the mouth of the cave

¹⁴² See Randén 2013, 183–4 for the role of rumors in spreading reports of oracular consultations.

¹⁴³ Woodman 2015, 256–8 definitively demonstrates the dependence of *Ann.* 2.53–4 on *Livy* 45.27. (Syme 1958, 733 and Goodyear 1981, 353 recognized the similarities, but doubted that they were deliberate.)

¹⁴⁴ See Woodman 2015, 257, and compare *Ann.* 2.54.1 with *Livy* 45.27.5. The motif of *cupido* also recalls Titus' trip to Paphos (*Hist.* 2.2.2) and Vespasian's visit to the temple of Serapis in Alexandria (*Hist.* 4.82.1); see Syme 1958, 771.

through which those who make use of the oracle descend to question the gods"). Unlike Germanicus, however, Paullus did not actually consult the oracle; instead, he was moved to sacrifice to the relevant gods at both sites (and indeed at seemingly every temple he encountered during his Greek travels), giving Livy's passage strong overtones of ritual piety that serves as a model for his readers to imitate.¹⁴⁵ Yet Germanicus fails to perform a single sacrifice, either here or in his subsequent trip to Egypt (*Ann.* 2.59–61); his only ritual act is the consultation of the oracle, and even that is unaccompanied by sacrifice, in contrast to the similar consultations of Titus (*Hist.* 2.4.1 *caesis compluribus hostiis*) and Vespasian (*Hist.* 2.78.3 *illic sacrificanti Vespasiano*).¹⁴⁶ One would expect someone as interested in the study of antiquity as Germanicus apparently is to have a better appreciation for the importance of cultic memory, yet he apparently does not feel the need to offer sacrifice.

This is part of Germanicus' general impassiveness throughout his journey so far. Unlike Livy's Paullus, who (as Woodman notes) takes on "the role of a sceptical historian" by visiting and evaluating famous sites that are less impressive in person than their reputation would suggest (45.27.5), Germanicus displays a "simpler attitude" in being motivated purely by "straightforward" *cupido*.¹⁴⁷ Germanicus' lack of awareness that sacrifice is appropriate is another manifestation of the uncritical, theatrical, *cupido*-driven characteristics that led to his histrionic and problematic use of religious rhetoric with his German legions. His visit to the oracle at Colophon thus adds not only to the gloom that began gathering during Germanicus' visits to Actium and Troy, but also to Tacitus' picture of him as ignorant of the standards of religious practice and strangely unresponsive to what he sees.

Germanicus' trip to Egypt shows that his failure to be affected by the ritual norms and religious connotations of Eastern sites is matched by equal ignorance of "real-world" factors in his rocky relationship with Tiberius. The opening of AD 19, like AD 18, finds Germanicus sightseeing in the East (cf. *Ann.* 2.53),¹⁴⁸ this time in Egypt: "Germanicus set off for Egypt to learn about antiquity. But concern for the province was offered as a pretext, and he relieved the price of grain by opening the granaries and accomplished many things that were pleasing to the crowd" (2.59.1 *Germanicus Aegyptum proficiscitur cognoscendae antiquitatis. sed cura provinciae praetendebatur, levavitque apertis horreis pretia frugum multaque in vulgus grata usurpavit*).

¹⁴⁵ Levene 2006, 86–7 sees Paullus' travels as metahistorical, "encourag[ing] one to proper—and in this case religious—actions."

¹⁴⁶ For evidence for sacrifice at Claros in the Roman period, see de la Genière and Amandry 1992, 207–8. The *ιερεὺς* attested in inscriptions was responsible for overseeing preliminary sacrifices made by those wishing to consult the oracle (Oosterheld 2008, 120 n. 223).

¹⁴⁷ Woodman 2015, 261–2.

¹⁴⁸ See Ginsburg 1981, 14–17 on Germanicus' prominence at the beginnings of year narratives.

It was illegal for Germanicus to be in Egypt for any reason, and scholars have debated fiercely about why he went.¹⁴⁹ Tacitus strikingly claims that Germanicus concealed his desire to sightsee by claiming to be there on official business. The fact that Germanicus highlights the administrative reasons for his visit and downplays the touristic ones shows extreme tone-deafness.¹⁵⁰ It would be far less threatening to Tiberius for Germanicus to use sightseeing as a pretext for a visit with an underlying political purpose, like Herodotus' Solon, who leaves Athens to avoid political problems but claims to be motivated by sightseeing in Egypt (Hdt. 1.29.1),¹⁵¹ or Julius Caesar, who masquerades as a tourist in Alexandria while preparing to capture Egypt.¹⁵² Germanicus' actual, but unacknowledged, reason for the trip fits into a long and venerable tradition of educated travel motivated by a desire for knowledge (ιστορία),¹⁵³ although it was still illegal for Germanicus to go to Egypt even for tourism without Imperial permission, it certainly would have been in his interest to highlight that innocuous motive as the true reason for his trip. This desire for historical knowledge is an important part of the characterization of Germanicus as a figure inextricably tied up with the past and out of place in the modern world of the principate.¹⁵⁴ Yet in the visit to Egypt, it is *not* that impulse for old-fashionedness that is the problem—it is his attempt to *hide* that impulse. If he chose to be *more* obviously old-fashioned, his standing with Tiberius might not suffer.

Germanicus “could scarcely have chosen a more ill-advised cover story” than concern for famine;¹⁵⁵ getting involved with the grain supply, of which all the Roman emperors, and particularly Tiberius, were very protective, is perhaps the worst thing Germanicus could have done. It was common practice for emperors to make gifts of grain when they visited the provinces, so Germanicus' decision to open the granaries makes it seem as though he wants to usurp Tiberius' place.¹⁵⁶ Tacitus' readers would have had a very good example of this phenomenon to look back on: namely, Vespasian, who made his bid for Imperial power from Egypt (*Hist.* 2.79.1). One of Tacitus' major propositions in the *Histories* is that after Galba came to power, “the secret of command was out: a *princeps* could be made somewhere other than Rome” (*Hist.* 1.4.2 *evulgato imperii arcano posse principem alibi quam Romae*

¹⁴⁹ Turner 1959 and Foertmeyer 1989, 114 believe that Germanicus' *maius imperium* (*Ann.* 2.43.1) granted by Tiberius justified the sojourn in Egypt; cf. *POxy.* 2435, recto 9–10. Van Ooteghem 1959 and Goodyear 1981, 378–9 believe Germanicus knew that his command did not include Egypt and deliberately disobeyed Tiberius. See Griffin 1997, 258 on evidence from the *SCPP*.

¹⁵⁰ Woodman 2015, 262.

¹⁵¹ This does not mean Solon was not genuinely interested in sightseeing; it is one of two reasons for his trip (Hdt. 1.30.1). On πρόφασις, cf. Thuc. 1.23.6, 6.6.1, and see e.g. Walbank 1957, on Polybius 3.6; Rawlings 1975, chs. 3–4; Heath 1986.

¹⁵² Frontin. *Str.* 1.1.5; App. *B Civ.* 2.89.

¹⁵³ Hunt 1984, 391–400.

¹⁵⁴ Pelling 1993, 72–4.

¹⁵⁵ Woodman 2006b, 182.

¹⁵⁶ Garnsey 1988, 252–3.

fieri). Egypt is seen as a particularly problematic area, and Tacitus highlights Augustus' concern with keeping Egypt off limits to potential challengers, with the grain supply as one among several reasons for this policy (*Hist.* 1.11.1). Germanicus of the *Annals* thus fits far too well into the Vespasian-paradigm of the *Histories*.

Tiberius holds fast to Augustus' prohibitions surrounding Egypt, and Tacitus' description of his anger uses a metaphor derived from cult, and again looks back to the *Histories*:

Tiberius cultu habituque eius lenibus verbis perstricto, acerrime increpuit quod contra instituta Augusti non sponte principis Alexandriam introisset. nam Augustus inter alia dominationis arcana, vetitis nisi permissu ingredi senatoribus aut equitibus Romanis inlustribus, seposuit Aegyptum, ne fame urgeret Italiam, quisquis eam provinciam claustraque terrae ac maris quamvis levi praesidio adversum ingentes exercitus insedisset. (*Ann.* 2.59.3)

(Tiberius, after criticizing his dress and behavior in mild words, reproached him most harshly because he had entered Alexandria against the will of the *princeps*, contrary to Augustus' established practice. For Augustus, among the other secrecies of domination, had set aside Egypt, forbidding senators or illustrious Roman equestrians to enter it except with permission, lest anyone, after occupying that province and its gateways on land and sea, even with a small force against great armies, should put pressure on Italy by means of famine.)

The prohibition on entering Egypt without the emperor's permission was no secret, but Augustus' undisclosed motivations for this pronouncement warrant the label *arcana*,¹⁵⁷ introducing religious overtones into the passage. Tacitus generally applies the word to esoteric religious practices of foreigners,¹⁵⁸ and it is often used in relation to mystery cults, to indicate knowledge available only to initiates.¹⁵⁹ Augustus' intentions are thus likened to secret religious knowledge. This is part of a larger complex of the use of the language of secrecy to describe the activities of the Imperial house. Other *arcana*, "unstated conditions of the emperor's power,"¹⁶⁰ include the "secret" of making emperors outside Rome (*Hist.* 1.4.2); the true circumstances of Agrippa Postumus' death, including the involvement of members of the Imperial house (*Ann.* 1.6.3);¹⁶¹ and the emperor's influence over the elections of magistrates (2.36.1). By using the word *arcana*, Tacitus reveals an ugly truth

¹⁵⁷ Goodyear 1981, 380.

¹⁵⁸ OLD s.v. *arcanus* 3; cf. *Germ.* 40.4, 18.2 (Germans); *Hist.* 5.9.1 (Jews); *Ann.* 2.54.3 (Colophon), 6.21.1 (astrology), 12.47.2 (Parthians).

¹⁵⁹ It is "a technical religious term" (Mankin 1995, 126 on *Hor. Epist.* 5.52) applied to the mystery cult of Demeter at Eleusis (*Hor. Carm.* 3.2.26; *Stat. Theb.* 12.133) and Egyptian rites (*Quint. Inst.* 1.12.15; *Apul. Met.* 11.21). For further examples see *TLL* 2.435.64–436.44, and esp. 437.74–438.24.

¹⁶⁰ Damon 2003, 102.

¹⁶¹ On the passage, see Woodman 1995a, who emphasizes Livia's role (263).

about the principate: certain things are off limits to anyone but the *princeps*. That closely guarded monopoly will not be broken until after the Julio-Claudian dynasty has fallen; evoking Vespasian's activities in Egypt allows Tacitus to show how much Germanicus, by comparison, is still mired in the secrecies of the Imperial system. Germanicus, in entering Egypt, is dangerously close to learning and exploiting the mystic "secret" of the province's importance, and how easily it could be captured. Tiberius' criticisms of Germanicus are stronger than his criticism of Germanicus' activities in the Teutoburg forest (*Ann.* 1.62.2), which were ostensibly based on religious correctness. When Germanicus makes what Tiberius argues is an error in the conduct of *actual* ritual, Tiberius merely disapproves (*haud probatum*); but when Germanicus profanes *metaphorical* rituals, the "mysteries" of Imperial power, it touches a nerve (*acerrime increpuit*).

Germanicus' visit to Thebes, the "centrepiece" of his trip described by Tacitus "in epicizing terms,"¹⁶² reveals his continuing imperviousness to the implications of his surroundings: a memorial of the past, preserved in a cultic setting, fails to make its intended impact.

et manebant structis molibus litterae Aegyptiae, priorem opulentiam complexae: iussusque e senioribus sacerdotum patrium sermonem interpretari, referebat habitasse quondam septingenta milia aetate militari, atque eo cum exercitu regem Rhamsen . . . inde Bithynum, hinc Lycium ad mare imperio tenuisse. legebantur et indicta gentibus tributa, pondus argenti et auri, numerus armorum equorumque et dona templis ebur atque odores, quasque copias frumenti et omnium utensilium quaeque natio penderet, haud minus magnifica quam nunc vi Parthorum aut potentia Romana iubentur. (*Ann.* 2.60.3–4)

(And on piles of masonry there remained Egyptian letters that summarized earlier opulence: and one of the elders of the priests, when ordered to interpret his country's language, reported that 700,000 men of military age had once dwelt there, and that King Ramses with that army . . . had held under his command the area stretching as far as the Bithynian sea on the one side and the Lycian on the other. Also read out were the tributes imposed on the nations, the weight of silver and gold, the number of weapons and horses and gifts to the temples of ivory and incense, and the supplies of grain and all sorts of provisions each nation had paid out—things no less magnificent than what is now at the bidding of the Parthians' strength or Roman power.)

Here, Germanicus is one step further removed from the message of a foreign site than he was at Colophon: the riddling replies of the Milesian *sacerdos* were presumably in Latin or Greek, but now he is confronted with a text in a language he cannot understand.¹⁶³ Again, as at Colophon, it is a religious specialist, an Egyptian *sacerdos*, who must interpret a message for Germanicus,

¹⁶² Woodman 2015, 258.

¹⁶³ Woodman 2015, 258.

this time by translating hieroglyphs¹⁶⁴ rather than acting as intermediary between him and Apollo; but now it is a message about the past, rather than the future. Through their linguistic knowledge, these priests become repositories for the cultural memory of Egypt, by being the only ones able to convey the content of inscriptions from the distant past to visitors in the Imperial present.¹⁶⁵ These priests provide a contrast with Germanicus, who, despite being a *sacerdos* himself,¹⁶⁶ remains astoundingly ignorant of the religious norms of his own ancestral Roman tradition. The inscription, in preserving Ramses' past deeds for present observers, is noteworthy as a *lieu de mémoire* and invites comparison with Germanicus' considerably less impressive recent monument in Germany: Ramses' is a pile of massive masonry (*structis molibus*), Germanicus' of weapons (2.22.1 *congeriem armorum struxit*),¹⁶⁷ Ramses won control of the territory stretching from the Black Sea to the northeastern Mediterranean (*inde Bithynum, hinc Lycium ad mare*),¹⁶⁸ Germanicus only between the Rhine and the Elbe (2.22.1 *inter Rhenum Albimque*); Ramses fought with his own army (*eo cum exercitu regem Rhamsen*), Germanicus with troops which belong to Tiberius (2.22.1 *exercitum Tiberii Caesaris*); Ramses' name proudly emblazons his monument, whereas Germanicus' had to be omitted from his (2.22.1 *de se nihil addidit*). Ramses' inscription mentions lavish dedications to temples (*dona templis ebur atque odores*), highlighting the valuable acts of worship for the gods that were able to take place as a result of his conquests. Germanicus, by contrast, has been limited to one triumph ceremony, since his recall from Germany will prevent him from winning further victories that would end in powerful sacrifice to Jupiter. Ramses' inscription "reads rather like the *Res Gestae*,"¹⁶⁹ even at the edges of the empire, Germanicus is confronted with palpable evidence of the kind of commemoration that he will be denied.

There is no indication of Germanicus' reaction to the information made available by the translator-priest. It is Tacitus who performs the crucial act of

¹⁶⁴ Priests often explained Egyptian rites and cults and served as hieroglyph translators to Greco-Roman tourists (Weingärtner 1969, 163; Foertmeyer 1989, 162–4, 171–2; Woodman 2015, 258 n. 15 with references there cited).

¹⁶⁵ The need for a priest to interpret the hieroglyphs makes Ramses' inscription an example of *SpeicherGEDächtnis* ("stored memory"), which, unlike *FunktionsGEDächtnis* ("functional memory"), is no longer "really needed, inhabited, and tended," and has to be actively reintegrated into functional memory in order to remain relevant (J. Assmann 2006, 25; see also A. Assmann 1999, 130–45). For another application of the concept to Tacitus, see Shannon 2012, 755–6.

¹⁶⁶ On Germanicus' priesthoods, see §2.3, pp. 86–7 and n. 67. The sodality of Augustus is described by Tacitus as a *sacerdotium* (1.54.1). *Sacerdos* was a broad designation that could encompass a wide variety of religious functionaries (Lampinen 2013, 161).

¹⁶⁷ One can see a similar contrast between the ruins of the pyramids (*Ann.* 2.61.1), impressive even in their state of ruin (Woodman 2015, 216 n. 20), and Germanicus' tumulus at Teutoburg, which is destroyed almost immediately (2.7.3).

¹⁶⁸ Woodman 2004, 71 n. 108.

¹⁶⁹ Woodman 2015, 259.

engaging with Ramses' memory by connecting the Pharaonic past with the Roman present: at the end of the priests' translation of the inscription, the historian breaks out of that narrative frame to compare Ramses' impressive tributes with those made to the Roman and Parthian empires in his own day.¹⁷⁰ Ramses' wealth is long gone (*priorem*), as is Pharaonic Egypt; only his tribute lists remain, and even these must be translated to be understood by a member of one of the world's two new major powers. This is, Tacitus implies, a case of the "changeability of fortune" like Actium or Troy, but on a worldwide scale: empires give way to one another.¹⁷¹ Tacitus does not necessarily wish to imply that Rome is on the brink of going the way of Ramses; indeed, he goes out of his way to highlight the successes Rome has experienced in her territorial expansion in Egypt in the decades since Germanicus' visit.¹⁷² Yet his focus on monumentality suggests that it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion that the deeds of individuals will be remembered as the years roll on. It is only thanks to the specialist knowledge of hieroglyphs carefully maintained across the centuries by Egyptian priests that Ramses' lasting monument is still accessible. The vicissitudes of history, which were on display at Actium and Troy, are connected with the ability of individuals to be commemorated across the shifting years, dependent upon ritual actions and religious specialists (Augustus' *sacratae manubiae* at Actium, the intervention of Egyptian priests); Germanicus, whose star the gods of Samothrace and Claros seem to think is on the wane, recognizes neither that he is subject to the same *varietas fortunae*, nor that his own reputation lacks the element of cultic memory that ensures that Ramses' name is still remembered.

Germanicus does not learn the lessons available to him at Actium, Troy, and Egypt. He also fails to recognize real-world signs of his impending demise; he does not realize until after his Egyptian visit that Piso has already begun to wipe out all traces of his presence in reversing his changes in Syria (*Ann.* 2.69.1). In the interest of self-preservation, he should perhaps have paid less attention to ancient sites and more attention to what was happening around him. We are in a topsy-turvy world, where the *princeps*' directives have the force of religious precepts, and Germanicus is forced to hide his ἰστορία-based motives for his visit behind a political facade. He fails on both counts and is equally ignorant of imperially constructed *arcana* and the workings of fate, fortune, and the gods.

¹⁷⁰ Weingärtner 1969, 175 suggests that this comparison was made in the priest's response, but *nunc* and the present tense *iubentur* make this impossible.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Kelly 2010, 232–5. For "*fortuna* as an agent of *translatio imperii*," see Matthews 2011, 149. For Tacitean notions of cyclical patterns in history, cf. *Ann.* 3.55.5, on which see Goodyear 1970, esp. 103–4; Feeney 2007, 115; Clarke 2002, 88 n. 17. For ancient notions of cyclical history in general, see Momigliano 1969, 22–35; passages cited by Woodman and Martin 1996, 407.

¹⁷² Woodman 2015, 259–60.

2.6 DEATH AND PISO

Germanicus' behavior during his last days continues to show his misunderstanding of supernatural forces, especially fate and *fortuna*, and their role in his death. On his deathbed, Germanicus refers several times to *fortuna*; his usage of the word and the context reinforce the reader's suspicion (already aroused by his apparent impassivity in the face of the words of Apollo's oracle and the examples of *varietas fortuna*, changes of empire, and the rapid downfall of his ancestors that he has encountered on his travels) that he is merely paying lip service to ideas of fate and chance. His deathbed speech to friends and family shows a muddled conception of the forces behind his fatal illness:

si fato concederem, iustus mihi dolor etiam adversus deos esset, quod me parentibus liberis patriae intra iuventam praemature exitu raperent: nunc scelere Pisonis et Plancinae interceptus ultimas preces pectoribus vestris relinquo.

(*Ann.* 2.71.1)

(If I were yielding to fate, my indignation, even directed against the gods, would be just, because by my premature departure they would be snatching me away from parents, children, country in the midst of my youth. In reality, cut off by the crime of Piso and Plancina, I leave my final prayers in your hearts.)

Fato concedere could simply be a euphemism for "to die naturally,"¹⁷³ but literally it means "to submit to fate."¹⁷⁴ If we keep that meaning in mind, Germanicus' statement indicates that he believes that Piso and Plancina's involvement proves that his current circumstances are not caused by fate, which implicitly gives him even more reason to be angry at the gods than he would have if he were "submitting to fate" by dying a natural, although premature, death.¹⁷⁵ His grievances toward heaven are perhaps also indicated by the fact that he directs his *ultimae preces* not to the gods, but to mortal onlookers, whom he asks to publicize the outrageous circumstances of his death (2.71.1). Yet Germanicus' outright rejection of *fatum* as a possible causative force for his death shows a certain ignorance: Apollo's oracle at Colophon has already predicted, albeit ambiguously, an untimely end (2.54.4). Now that the worst has happened, instead of looking back at the god's prediction and realizing that his early death has been preordained all along, he believes that this death is not his *fatum* solely because he suspects Piso's involvement. This is a simplistic understanding of the mechanics of causation: Germanicus fails to recognize causal overdetermination when he sees it.

¹⁷³ For the expression, see Goodyear 1981, 412.

¹⁷⁴ OLD s.v. *concedo* 3c.

¹⁷⁵ Submission to fate is not necessarily incompatible with anger; cf. Virgil's Dido (*Aen.* 4.532, 614) and Euripides' Amphitryon (Eur. *HF* 339–47, 502) and Ion (Eur. *Ion* 437–51, 1312–13, 1385–8).

Apparently both fate *and* Piso have been at work in his demise, much as Varus had perished “due to fate *and* Arminius’ strength” (1.55.3 *fato et vi Armini*). Despite having all the information necessary to realize that this is indeed his *fatum*, Germanicus maintains a theatrical denial that eschews any deeper thinking about the divine.

Germanicus’ last words to his friends and wife also give prominence to the idea of *fortuna* (whose meaning slips between “Imperial rank,” “chance,” and the idea of fortune as an implacable and angry force) and its role in dictating how he will be remembered after his death. His calls to his friends for vengeance appear to show awareness of *fortuna*’s role in determining his popularity: “Even men unknown will weep for Germanicus; you will avenge, if you supported me rather than my fortune” (*Ann.* 2.71.3 *flebunt Germanicum etiam ignoti: vindicabitis vos, si me potius quam fortunam meam fovebatis*). *Fortuna* here may refer to Imperial rank¹⁷⁶ or to good luck in general. He realizes that his position of prominence and/or the apparent success that has attended him in life will cause him to be publicly mourned even by people who do not know him personally; but he hopes that his friends will be motivated by more than mere *fortuna*, and will work to avenge him now that he is dying. Scholars have seen a parallel for this idea in Aeneas’ words to Ascanius at *Aen.* 12.435–6: “Son, learn of excellence and true labour from me, but fortune from others” (*disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem, / fortunam ex aliis*).¹⁷⁷ But the two speeches are rather dissimilar: whereas Germanicus is speaking at least partly of his rank, Aeneas is talking about fortune in the sense of luck.¹⁷⁸ There is also an important contrast in the two speakers’ attitudes. Aeneas’ words acknowledge his own (mostly bad) fortune, of which he has been aware throughout the *Aeneid*.¹⁷⁹ Yet Germanicus, as we have seen, has consistently failed to internalize lessons about *fortuna* and the swift vacillations between success and failure that Tacitus tells us were on view during his travels. Even on his deathbed, he primarily conceives of fortune as rank, in terms of the fame it brings him. Germanicus does not recognize that *fortuna* (in the sense of “success” or “good fortune”) is deserting him in death, just as he does not realize the role *fatum* is playing in his demise. This is a stark contrast with other Tacitean characters, particularly Otho in the *Histories*, who recognizes just before his death that fortune has deserted him (*Hist.* 2.47.1) and is unwilling to blame the gods for his downfall (*Hist.* 2.47.3). Ever theatrical, even in his last moments, Germanicus only *appears* to submit to fortune, and remains aggrieved at the gods. But the slippage in meaning in *Ann.* 2.71.1 (between supernatural *fortuna* and the *fortuna* of Imperial rank) highlights the problem posed by the principate. Otho’s fortunes in the civil wars of AD 68–9

¹⁷⁶ For this usage, see Matthews 2011, 122–5.

¹⁷⁷ Savage 1942, 166; see also Baxter 1972, 267–8.

¹⁷⁹ See Tarrant 2012, 203 for examples.

¹⁷⁸ Goodyear 1981, 413.

more clearly depend on the vagaries of chance, but for Germanicus there is also a human agent who has helped determine his destiny. Germanicus only has the prominent position he does because of his Imperial lineage and because Tiberius was forced to adopt him (1.3.5, 4.57), and he has only been sent into the East, where he meets his end, because Tiberius wanted him out of the way in a distant and potentially dangerous place (2.5.1). Tacitus shows the forces at work behind Germanicus' demise to be manifold and complex: Tiberius, Piso, and the gods are all hostile toward Germanicus. His death is causally overdetermined by a deadly cocktail of antagonistic forces of which he is largely unaware.

Fortuna appears again in Germanicus' last words to his wife, Agrippina the Elder:

Tum ad uxorem versus per memoriam sui, per communes liberos oravit, exueret ferociam, saevienti fortunae summitteret animum, neu regressa in urbem aemulatione potentiae validiores inritaret. haec palam et alia secreto, per quae ostender<e> credebatur metum ex Tiberio. (*Ann.* 2.72.1)

(Then, turning to his wife, he begged her by his memory and their common children to put aside her fierceness, submit her mind to raging fortune, and not to provoke those stronger than herself by rivalry for power once she returned to the city. He gave that message publicly, but in secret other words, in which he was believed to have shown fear of Tiberius.)

Summittere animum is a phrase frequently used by Seneca as he counsels resistance to *fortuna*, his prescription for attaining the Good in the problematic political world of the principate.¹⁸⁰ But Agrippina is told to do the opposite: to adopt a resigned attitude and accept whatever is sent her way by *fortuna*, here likened to a savage goddess. Yet Germanicus also adds a more “practical” observation about non-divine opponents. If Germanicus means his words about *fortuna* seriously, perhaps he is saying that Agrippina will have to contend with both supernatural forces and her political superiors, showing an awareness of the type of dual causation that he is so unable to see as it applies to his own situation. Indeed, the subsequent narrative will show that Germanicus' warning about the hostility of *fortuna* is oddly prescient: as the crowd notes while observing her as she departs for Rome, Agrippina is “so many times dependent on fortune because of her unlucky fertility” (2.75.1 *infelici fecunditate fortunae totiens obnoxia*). The motif of the savagery of *fortuna* will return later in Tiberius' principate (4.1.1) when Sejanus rises to prominence, with particularly bad consequences for Agrippina and her children.¹⁸¹ But it is also possible Germanicus does not truly believe that *fortuna* as a supernatural

¹⁸⁰ For the phrase, see Goodyear 1981, 414. For Seneca's conception of *fortuna*, see Asmis 2009; Matthews 2011, 271–86.

¹⁸¹ See §4.5, pp. 195–6 and 197–8, and §5.3, pp. 219–20.

force is relevant. The message to Agrippina, delivered in secret and therefore perhaps indicative of his unvarnished opinion, is more a “real-world” warning than a meditation on supernatural forces: mention of Tiberius gives more specificity to his public remark about not challenging the powerful, but it is no longer framed as advice about acknowledging superior supernatural forces. His message is one thing in public, a slightly different thing in private. Germanicus seems to have changed little since we first met him during the German mutinies. He is happy to talk about supernatural or divine forces, but only in public, when the goal is to persuade (to convince rebellious soldiers to fall back into line) or to hide his true thoughts (as a cover for a more pointed warning to Agrippina that Tiberius is out to get her).

Germanicus’ illness and death cause problems of religious interpretation for others, too: Piso’s actions before Germanicus’ death show his lack of awareness of the religious status of Imperial family members. He disrupts sacrifices the people of Antioch offer on Germanicus’ behalf after his illness seems to improve:

mox adversa Germanici valetudine detentus, ubi recreatum accepit votaque pro incolumitate solvebantur, admotas hostias, sacrificalem apparatus, festam Antiochensium plebem per lictores proturbat. (*Ann.* 2.69.2)

(Then, detained by Germanicus’ bad health, when he heard that he had recovered and vows were being discharged for his well-being, with his lictors he shoved out of the way the victims that had been brought in, the sacrificial equipment, and the festive *plebs* of Antioch.)

Such an interruption had serious religious consequences: if a sacrifice were disrupted, a ceremony of *instauratio* needed to be performed to restore the gods’ good favor.¹⁸² Sacrifices on behalf of the well-being of members of the Imperial family were by Tacitus’ day routine, and even in the Julio-Claudian period they had quickly become normal.¹⁸³ Tacitus’ readers, looking at these events with the benefit of hindsight, would recognize the sacrifice that Piso is interrupting as a perfectly permissible one, making the disruption look like a malicious attempt to prevent the gods from assisting Germanicus’ recovery, an intervention that looks especially bad for Piso given Germanicus’ subsequent turn for the worse. Yet from Piso’s point of view within the text, it may not be so obvious that these sacrifices are normal or permissible. They are the first sacrifices made on behalf of a member of the Imperial family that Tacitus has reported in the *Annals*, and such sacrifices have never been clearly allowed or prohibited. While Tiberius has clarified his own and Livia’s position as being

¹⁸² See Cohee 1994. Cf. Cicero’s outrage when Clodius disrupts the Ludi Megalenses (*Har. resp.* 23); the interruption of the Ludi Romani under Coriolanus (Livy 2.36; Plut. *Cor.* 24); and Livy 5.17.1–4.

¹⁸³ Reynolds 1962; Weinstock 1971, 218–19; Price 1980, 32–3; Price 1984, 214; Gradel 2002, 21–2, 370–1.

inferior to that of *divus Augustus* (1.73), he never offers a ruling on other members of the Imperial family, or on whether acts of worship offered on their behalf are permissible. Piso may be acting maliciously, but perhaps Tiberius' policies have made it impossible for him to know Germanicus' appropriate place in religious ritual.

Similar questions about the nature of Piso's actions arise again when curse tablets and magical objects are found in Germanicus' house:

saevam vim morbi augebat persuasio veneni a Pisone accepti; et reperiebantur solo ac parietibus erutae humanorum corporum reliquiae, carmina et devotiones et nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum, semusti cineres ac tabo obliti aliaque malefica, quis creditur animas numinibus infernis sacrari. simul missi a Pisone incusabantur ut valetudinis adversa rimantes. (*Ann.* 2.69.3)

(The savage strength of the disease was increased by the conviction that he had been given the poison by Piso. And in the floor and walls were discovered the exhumed remains of human bodies; spells, curses, and the name of Germanicus inscribed upon tablets made of lead, half-burnt ashes smeared with putrid gore, and other black-magical items with which it is believed that souls are consecrated to infernal powers. At the same time, men sent by Piso were accused of scrutinizing the state of his health.)

The spells and ritual objects deployed against Germanicus show several characteristics of *defixiones*, often used against rivals but rarely admitted to since such spells were socially unacceptable and even illegal.¹⁸⁴ They involved inscriptions on lead tablets, frequently including the name of the person targeted in order to give the curser a magical power over the cursed.¹⁸⁵ The curses often used a *similia similibus* formula ("Let X become cold/useless like this lead"), or (especially in the Roman period) took the forms of prayers consecrating the accursed to the gods of the underworld, and were often buried in tombs, displaying a similar wish for the cursed person to take on the qualities of a corpse.¹⁸⁶ Yet several aspects of the curses from Germanicus' walls exceed normal practice. It was not usually thought necessary for a curse tablet to be physically close to its intended victim in order for the *defixio* to work, and they are regularly found deposited in cemeteries or wells, locations that are powerful, but not because of their proximity to the victim.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, there is redundancy in using both exhumed and cremated remains (the latter smeared with gore as if to heighten their effectiveness), in a "relentless repetition."¹⁸⁸ These unusual and excessive details are seemingly intended to ensure the ritual's effectiveness: the anonymous magician wants to make very sure that Germanicus is dead. Part of his agenda may also be

¹⁸⁴ Versnel 1991, 62–3; Gager 1992; Pulleyn 1997, 82–93.

¹⁸⁵ Gager 1992, 14.

¹⁸⁶ Faraone 1991, 6–9.

¹⁸⁷ Tupet 1980, 350; Gager 1992, 18–20.

¹⁸⁸ Tupet 1980, 349 ("la répétition acharnée").

psychological effect. Tacitus states that Germanicus, or perhaps those around him, already believed he was being poisoned before the magical objects were discovered.¹⁸⁹ Tacitus does not say who is responsible for the curses, nor how Germanicus reacts to them, but juxtaposing suspicions of Piso's involvement with a description of the curse paraphernalia (linked by *et*) suggests that the discovery of the magic objects heightens suspicions of foul play and perhaps that Piso was suspected of involvement in the curses as well as the poisoning. These suspicions are further strengthened if Piso's behavior at the sacrifice has already caused him to be suspected of antipathy to Germanicus. Similarly, Piso's behavior when the tablets and human remains are discovered (*simul*) increases suspicion: his prurient interest in Germanicus' illness recalls Domitian's frequent enquiries during Agricola's last days that increased suspicion of his involvement in Agricola's demise (*Agr.* 43.2).¹⁹⁰ It remains ambiguous whether Piso was actually involved in either poisoning or black magic. At worst, Piso is a deliberately impious disrupter of sacrifices, poisoner, and dabbler in the black arts; at best, he is inept, ignorant of the potentially serious consequences of his unintentionally suspicious actions. What Germanicus thinks of the supernatural forces potentially at play due to the magical objects remains shrouded in mystery.

2.7 CONCLUSIONS

Tacitus uses the narrative of Germanicus' campaigns, travels, illness, and death to raise questions about the interpretation of signs and about correct religious ritual. In responding to these questions, Germanicus sometimes reveals himself as a canny, theatrical opportunist, who is able to spot and make traditional religious interpretations of the events in which he is involved, but mainly with the goal of capitalizing on them when it is advantageous to him to do so. At other times, Germanicus is actually ignorant of matters involving divine or supernatural forces and misses interpretations (especially of signs and prophecies) that should seem fairly obvious to anyone familiar with the traditional system. Even more worryingly, the errors into which he falls are not dissimilar to the problems of Tiberius.

As a religious actor, Germanicus is characterized by a number of unattractive qualities. One of these is his impetuous, showmanlike tendency, as revealed in

¹⁸⁹ *Persuasio* probably indicates Germanicus' belief, but it could equally be that of onlookers (Goodyear 1981, 409 opts for both simultaneously). *Persuasio* can signify one's own personal conviction (*OLD* s.v. *persuasio* 3), but may also have the "active" sense of inducing belief in someone (*OLD* s.v. *persuasio* 2).

¹⁹⁰ Furneaux 1896, 366.

his swift and uncritical interpretation of omens and dreams and in his emotive rhetoric that draws heavily on the language of ritual pollution. In the narrative of his activities in Germany, Tacitus brings out these qualities in Germanicus by offering up for comparison miniature portraits of other commanders (Blaesus, Caecina) who play upon their troops' superstitious tendencies or read supernatural signs in a more measured, less self-aggrandizing way. Unlike these more cautious commanders, Germanicus, in his haste to assert his authority over mutinous troops, adopts a rhetoric of expiation that leads his troops into problematic talk of human sacrifice and the destruction of shrines, both of which likewise could draw the gods' wrath. This situation has an analog in Tiberius' interpretation of the Tiber flood (*Ann.* 1.76, 79): his refusal to view the flood as a prodigy centers religious authority in his hands at the expense of preserving the traditional prodigy-expiation system, potentially opening Rome up to divine anger. Both the *princeps* and his major rival, then, show authoritarian tendencies in cult matters that could have serious religious consequences.

Another significant problem is the way Germanicus relates to emperor cult: his prayers to *divus Julius* and *divus Augustus* are paired with prayers to Drusus (*Ann.* 1.43.3), Germanicus' non-divine father, and are worded in ways that assert his own closeness to the *divi* he worships. Even mentions of the *divi* that come not in a context of prayer seem designed to demonstrate how similar to them Germanicus is (1.42.3). All of this is very similar to Tiberius' relationship with emperor cult, where the deification of Augustus is linked closely with Tiberius' legitimation of his own position. Germanicus suffers from the same impulse to ride on the coattails of the *divi*. This tendency of using emperor cult for some form of self-aggrandizement, then, is also a problem more widespread within the Imperial family and not simply a quirk of Tiberius alone. That is a powerful demonstration of the consequences of this new form of cultic memory that has come into being with the creation of the principate: in addition to the problems it is already causing in Rome, whether in *maiestas* trials or in the way it encourages worshipful treatment of Tiberius, the deification of Augustus is making its negative effects felt even when commanders address their troops on the edges of the empire.

Germanicus' other salient characteristic is ignorance, both of the religious *exempla* of the past and of the ways fate and fortune are implicated in his demise. While travelling the East, he fails to live up to the intertextual standard of piety provided by Livy's Paullus who once sacrificed in those same lands. At Actium and in Egypt, he fails to recognize that individuals and empires rise and fall. We have no indication of his reaction to the bad weather that drives him away from the Samothracian mysteries, or to an ambiguous prophecy about his death. Had Tacitus wished to make Germanicus into a viable alternative to Tiberius in terms of cultic memory, we would expect an insightful character who pays due attention to the gods, considers prophecies

carefully, performs rituals regularly and punctiliously, and is alive to the implications of events that previously occurred in the places he visits. But Germanicus does none of these things; Tacitus suggests to the reader that there is a significance to historical events at Actium, Troy, Colophon, and Egypt that is relevant to Germanicus' situation, but Germanicus is unable to see it. Even on his deathbed, he pays only lip service to *fatum* and *fortuna*.

When it comes to religion, then, Germanicus is not entirely Pelling's figure of the-past-in-the-present. This is an important crux in the narrative of religious memory in *Annals* 1–2. Germanicus is certainly a key figure for cultic and cultural memory in the *Annals*, in that he embodies both the past and the act of looking back at that past; but too often he is incapable of changing his present behavior and modeling it on the past's traditional norms. If Germanicus is the last member of an endangered species (to return to the zoological analogy from the beginning of this chapter), he is a defective one, lacking a key piece of DNA that links him to all previous members of his species and enables his own healthy functioning. His striking failures in religious memory set him apart from the figures of the Roman past whom he resembles in other respects, meaning that he cannot serve as a living repository of traditionalism in this all-important area of Roman existence. Even Germanicus, then, is very much a creature of his time.

This previously unappreciated aspect of Germanicus' character has an important bearing on Tacitus' depiction of his relationship with Tiberius and is therefore a crucial factor in understanding how changes in religious memory are closely related to other problems with the principate. When Germanicus' interpretations of religious questions occasionally bring him into direct conflict with Tiberius, we see again that the institution of the principate has wrought fundamental changes in how questions relating to cultic memory are answered. Tiberius seizes upon the question of ritual pollution in Germanicus' burial of Varus' war dead (*Ann.* 1.62); although none of the priesthoods Germanicus holds prohibit him from contact with corpses, Tiberius as *princeps* and *pontifex maximus* has the last word on the matter. Tiberius can also prevent Germanicus from participation in cultic memory: he has the authority to recall Germanicus from the best military arena in Germany and thereby ensure that he never will dedicate triumphal laurels to Jupiter Optimus Maximus again; his criticism over the tumulus prevents Germanicus from burying Varus' dead again after it is destroyed; and the general tenor of his relations with Germanicus ensure that the dedication of spoils from his campaigns is only a pile of German weapons without Germanicus' name even being attached to the monument. This is the difference the principate has made.

Analysis of Germanicus, then, in addition to illuminating a previously unappreciated aspect of his character, sheds important light on the destructive relationship between Tiberius and those whom he rules: how healthy is a

society in which even Germanicus, symbolic of the past and of memory, cannot get religious memory right? Tacitus does not give even to Germanicus the tools he needs to succeed religiously under the principate. If Tiberius is emblematic of a broken system, Germanicus shows how pervasive these religious problems are. Germanicus is no better than Tiberius; he is interested in the past, but is incapable of living according to principles of religious memory in the present. If even this rival of Tiberius cannot do any better, there is little confidence that Roman religious memory can ever be repaired.

Memory and Forgetting from the Death of Germanicus to the Rise of Sejanus

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In some respects, *Annals* 3 is a book in transition. Syme famously regarded it as filler material lacking “signal and striking events,” meant to occupy the time between Germanicus’ death and the death of Tiberius’ son and new heir Drusus.¹ There is little in the way of the narratives on foreign wars which were traditional for Roman historiography; instead, Tacitus devotes an exceptional amount of space to describing senatorial proceedings, leading to the impression that he is chronicling disparate matters with no thematic unity, linked by no principle other than the fact that they came up for discussion in the Senate.²

Yet *Annals* 3 is far from a throwaway book, especially from the point of view of religion and memory: this portion of Tacitus’ narrative contains important developments in the trajectory of change and decline set up in *Annals* 1 and 2. The immediate aftermath of Germanicus’ death provides further evidence of the destructive nature of the relationship between Tiberius and his subjects, and of the difficulties of commemorating members of the Imperial family in an era when Augustus’ deification makes their status ambiguous. Tiberius’ aloofness and his failure to provide explicit guidance on these questions are still very much in evidence, and the result is now a slide toward flattery on the part of his subjects, manifested in problematic cultic innovations as they seek to commemorate Germanicus. At the same time, the tendency to treat the living emperor as a god is still alive and well and continues to impact Rome’s judicial system; the effects of Augustus’ deification continue to reverberate.

Tacitus also provides further insights into Tiberius’ tendency to make religious decisions based on whim rather than traditional procedures. The senatorial material that forms the bulk of *Annals* 3, disparate though it may

¹ Syme 1984, 1028. For a different view, see Woodman and Martin 1996, 6–7.

² Ginsburg 1981, 85, 87.

seem, is key to understanding the workings of religion and memory. Several of the questions discussed in the Senate have to do with cult, allowing Tacitus to highlight the Senate's relationship with Tiberius when it comes to religious decision-making. In his descriptions of a proposal about the *flamen Dialis* and of diplomatic visits from Asian provinces, Tacitus illustrates how ignorant the Senate has become of its traditional religious roles and raises doubts about the continued functioning of cultic memory in the Imperial era. In the brave new world of the principate, Romans struggle to maintain continuity in the ancestral priesthoods that are an important part of Rome's cultural identity and its continued health as a community. In depicting this struggle, Tacitus explores the consequences of cultural amnesia: is it actually possible to keep Rome's ancient religious system intact and unchanged in every particular?

3.2 COMMEMORATION, FLATTERY, VENGEANCE: GERMANICUS' FUNERAL AND PISO'S TRIAL

Germanicus' death prompts an extreme reaction in Rome, another instance of ritual activity that amounts to flattery of the Imperial house. Rumors of Germanicus' apparent recovery, quickly spread and immediately believed (*Ann.* 2.82.4 *statim credita, statim vulgata sunt*), make the commons (*vulgus*) try to "force open the doors of temples (2.82.4 *moliuntur templorum fores*)" in their rush to make sacrifices of thanksgiving. The verb *molior* in historical texts frequently describes attempts to work open a door or gate, as during a siege.³ This amounts to an attack on the temples, reminiscent of Tacitus' description of the horrific assault on the Capitoline temple during the civil wars of AD 68–9 (*Hist.* 3.71.2).⁴ The commons' frenzied worship is uncomfortably close to the irreligious destruction of civil war, something which Tacitus has hinted is a distinct possibility among Piso's legions in the East (*Ann.* 2.76.1). Even when he is not physically present, Germanicus can inspire others to uncritical and violent ritual behavior; his words were enough to convince his troops to expiate their sins with German blood,⁵ and rumors about his health create a similar state of frenzy that puts Rome's own temples under attack. Tiberius is also partly responsible for the situation in Rome, since he refuses to quash the rumors that give rise to such behavior (2.82.5).

³ Oakley 1997, 644 and parallels there cited, esp. Tac. *Hist.* 2.22.2 *moliuntur portas*, on which see also Ash 2007a, 137.

⁴ Ash 2007b, 231. Suet. *Calig.* 5 presents the "attack" on the temples as an assault on the gods motivated by anger at Germanicus' destruction (Versnel 1980).

⁵ See §2.2, pp. 77–9.

This pro-Germanicus frenzy eventually manifests itself not in the threatened civil conflict, but in a long list of honors the Senate proposes in his memory:⁶

Honores, ut quis amore in Germanicum aut ingenio validus, reperti decretique: ut nomen eius Saliari carmine caneretur; sedes curules sacerdotum Augustalium locis superque eas querceae coronae statuerentur; ludos circenses eburna effigies praeiret; neve quis flamen aut augur in locum Germanici nisi gentis Iuliae crearetur. arcus additi Romae et apud ripam Rheni et in monte Syriae Amanum cum inscriptione rerum gestarum ac mortem ob rem publicam obisse; sepulchrum Antiochiae ubi crematus, tribunal Epidaphnae quo in loco vitam finierat. statuarum locorumve, in quis coleretur, haud facile quis numerum inierit.

(*Ann.* 2.83.1–2)

(Honors were discovered and decreed, in accordance with the strength of each man's love for Germanicus—or of his cleverness: that Germanicus' name should be sung in the Salian hymn; that curule chairs should be set up in the places of the priests of Augustus, and oak-leaf wreaths above them; that an ivory statue should lead the circus games; and that no one should be elected *flamen* or augur in Germanicus' place unless he were of the Julian clan. There were added arches at Rome, and on the bank of the Rhine, and on Mount Amanus in Syria, with an inscription of his achievements and that he had met death on behalf of the Republic; a tomb at Antioch where he had been cremated; and a tribunal at Epidaphna, the place where he had ended his life. It would not be easy for anyone to arrive at the number of statues and places at which he was worshipped.)

None of these honors indicates that Germanicus is being worshipped as a god.⁷ Some of them (the *sepulchrum* and *tribunal*) belong to normal funerary cult and the worship of Germanicus' *di manes*.⁸ Nevertheless, several items in Tacitus' list go far beyond what the average (non-Imperial) deceased Roman could hope to receive.⁹ These more extraordinary acts seem designed to embed commemoration of Germanicus into the cultic memory of the Roman state. Including his name in the *Carmen Saliare*, sung regularly by the Salii on fixed festival occasions, would ensure that it would be repeated annually by members of one of Rome's most ancient priesthoods as part of a ritual known for its

⁶ For the Senate's role, see Gonzalez 1999, 123.

⁷ Most of the honors Tacitus lists are paralleled in the *Tabula Hebana* and *Tabula Siarensis*, such as the *Carmen Saliare* (*Tab. Heb.* 4–5; *Tab. Siar.* 2c.18–20); the curule chairs and *corona civica* (*Tab. Heb.* 50–4); the arches in Rome, Germany, and Syria (*Tab. Siar.* 1.9–34); the tomb in Antioch (*Tab. Siar.* 1.35–6); the tribunal at Epidaphna (*Tab. Siar.* 1.37); and the image among the *auctores eloquentiae* (*Tab. Heb.* 1–2; *Tab. Siar.* 2c.13–15). Tacitus' *effigies* and restrictions on the flamine do not appear in the extant text of the inscriptions (although cf. the statues of *Tab. Siar.* 2b.7–11, with Crawford and Clout 1996, 1.536).

⁸ On offerings for the *manes* see Ovid *Fast.* 2.535–41 (with Robinson 2011, 336–41); *CIL* 8.5708; *ILS* 8110 = *CIL* 9.1729 (describing a funerary *tribunal* for a private citizen); Lattimore 1942, 90–5; Toynbee 1971, 62–3; Goodyear 1981, 435–6.

⁹ Scheid 1993, 199–200.

archaic origins. Indeed, the *Carmen Saliare* was by Tacitus' day almost a byword for a religious fossil,¹⁰ and even in the Republican era the obscure text had needed commentaries to explain its archaisms to a modern audience.¹¹ Augustus, who had given special attention to the priesthood of the Salii as part of his religious reforms, had already had his name included in the hymn, as had Gaius and Lucius.¹² To Romans of the Imperial period hearing the hymn as part of a ritual, these newer sections containing familiar Julio-Claudian names would have provided "a striking moment of intelligibility" in a long litany of traditional gods who were invoked by archaic and, by now unfamiliar, names.¹³ Adding Germanicus' name confirms his special status by forcing a change to religious memory in the future: one of Rome's most archaic ritual texts is altered in order to commemorate him, building a beloved member of the Imperial house into the annual repetition of a classic religious text.¹⁴

The ivory statue of Germanicus that will "lead the circus games" represents a similar addition to longstanding rituals. This is a reference to the *pompa circensis*, the parade preceding circus games that included statues of the gods among its many elements.¹⁵ Addition of Germanicus' statue to the parade represents an update of Rome's many annually-celebrated *ludi*; although the inclusion does not necessarily elevate Germanicus to the status of a god, it nevertheless shows "the *domus Augusta* [taking] a clear place within ritual," as Arena has noted.¹⁶ Furthermore, his statue is not just part of the procession, but its leader (*praefectus*); this would have "visually transmitted the message that the *domus Augusta* was the connection between earth and heaven, between men and gods to the people."¹⁷ Given the confusion that has already pervaded the *Annals* as to whether members of the Imperial *domus* are to be honored differently from actual *divi*, this ritual change seems liable to perpetuate that confusion.

¹⁰ Quint. *Inst.* 2.6.40 asserts that the songs remain important despite being "scarcely understood sufficiently by their own priests" (*et Saliorum carmina vix sacerdotibus suis satis intellecta*). Sarullo 2014, 25 compares this to the recitation of the paternoster by modern Roman Catholics who do not otherwise have a command of Latin.

¹¹ Sarullo 2014, 24–6.

¹² Augustus: Aug. *RG* 10.1; Dio 51.20.1, with Sarullo 2014, 211, 233. Gaius and Lucius: *Tab. Heb.* 2. On the importance of the Salii during the Augustan period, see Bremmer 1993, 161–2. Even Augustus may not have been the first addition (Rappaport 1920, 1891–3; Goodyear 1981, 434).

¹³ Miller 2014, 459–60.

¹⁴ Habinek 2005, 25–6 stresses the adaptability of the *Carmen Saliare* and its affinity to Imperial power.

¹⁵ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.13.

¹⁶ Arena 2009, 81–2; see 70–80, 83–4 for many examples of statues of members of the Imperial house being included in the procession, from Julius Caesar to the second century AD. This was "an honour for the dead, not a divine honour" (Weinstock 1971, 186).

¹⁷ Arena 2009, 85.

Other honors seem intended to commemorate Germanicus for his service to Rome's gods during his lifetime. The curule chairs in the theatre are related to his office as a *flamen* of Augustus,¹⁸ and so are the oak-leaf crowns to be placed there;¹⁹ the empty chairs are a reminder that one of the *Augustales* is missing. The detailed prescriptions about successors to Germanicus' flamine and augurate also indicate a desire to commemorate his role in the priesthood, leading to a sort of double layer of memory: Germanicus' service as *flamen Augusti* was itself an act of ritual-oriented memorialization of Augustus, which the Senate, by limiting Germanicus' former place to members of the Julian *gens* in the future, wishes to keep firmly within that family.

Germanicus will be forever remembered as part of one of Rome's oldest religious rituals and as a dutiful priest of *divus Augustus* who met his end in service of the *res publica*. This is at odds with the Germanicus whom Tacitus has shown the reader: impetuous, prone to problematic religious rhetoric, praying to Augustus mostly to persuade, impervious to the lessons of the past, and blind to the vicissitudes of fortune. The assertion that he died "on behalf of the state" feels out of place, too, given that Germanicus perished during an Eastern mission characterized mostly by conflict with Tiberius. The Senate's honors show a whitewashing of Germanicus' posthumous memory, a careful papering-over of these cracks in the Imperial edifice. The spirit in which the honors are decreed makes them even more problematic. The phrase *honores, ut quis amore in Germanicum aut ingenio validus reperti decretique* (*Ann.* 2.83.1) has an ironical tone,²⁰ and the notion that it takes special mental skill to "discover" new honors for Germanicus suggests insincerity, recalling the *adulatio* of 1.14.1 and 2.32.2. The honors, even if they do not amount to a cult of the deified Germanicus, are still described as worship (2.83.2 *coleretur*),²¹ at sites too numerous for Tacitus to count.²² The honors' uncountable excess suggests a lack of moderation, and while Germanicus is not elevated to divine status, *coleretur* shows an inappropriate religious attitude in his commemorators.

Moreover, the uncertainty about whether Germanicus is an acceptable recipient of ritual honors that played into the excessive worship during his illness (*Ann.* 2.82.4) is still not being dispelled: Tiberius' response to these adulatory proposals does not clarify how they should be perceived. In the *Tabula Siarensis* (1.3–8), Tiberius and other members of the Imperial family took an active role in proposing these honors, but Tacitus erases all traces of

¹⁸ On the *sella curulis*, see Weinstock 1957, 150–3. Among priests, only the *flamen Dialis* and (evidently) the *flamines* of Augustus were granted the right to use this type of seat.

¹⁹ Cf. *Tab. Heb.* 50–2; Weinstock 1957, 152.

²⁰ Koestermann 1963, 406; Goodyear 1981, 433.

²¹ See *OLD* s.v. *colere* 6a, b.

²² This foreshadows Tacitus' description of excessive rejoicing in Neronian Rome at the death of Octavia (*Ann.* 14.64.3; see §7.5, pp. 310–11).

his involvement;²³ his Tiberius can only react to what those around him suggest and does not lead the way by proposing honors that would offer some definitive ruling about the appropriate way to commemorate deceased members of the Imperial family who do not become *divi*. The only suggestion Tiberius opposes outright is the magnificently large golden *clipeus* inserted among those of the orators, saying that it is only Germanicus' rank (*fortuna*) that has inspired the proposal (2.83.3). For Tiberius, the other honors that would inscribe Germanicus into the ritual landscape of Roman tradition are apparently not problematic; even including him in a literary "hall of fame" is permissible as long as he is not elevated above other writers whom *fortuna* has not made members of the Imperial house. Contrast Tiberius' boastful attitude in the Senate when twins are born to Drusus and Livilla: this blessing, apparently unlike Germanicus' eloquence, is worth bragging about, since it appears in a family of high rank (2.84.1: twins had been born to "no Roman of the same eminence before," *nulli ante Romanorum eiusdem fastigii viro*), although Tacitus emphasizes that he is boasting of something that is merely fortuitous ("for he turned everything into glory, even things that were fortuitous," *nam cuncta, etiam fortuita, ad gloriam vertebat*). Tiberius has not offered any definitive guidance as to how Germanicus (or indeed any member of the Imperial family) is to be distinguished from other, non-Imperial people in contexts of ritual and commemoration, leaving the door open for future senatorial decrees of ritual honors that are evidently motivated by flattery. Both Tiberius and the *populus* seem to have trouble with this; the problem afflicts all levels of society.

Tiberius continues to offer confusing guidance in his edict to the Roman people in response to popular criticism of Germanicus' funeral, which some feel fails to commemorate his greatness sufficiently. Given Tiberius' notable absence from Germanicus' funeral proceedings,²⁴ any attempt at consoling the grieving public rings hollow, but Tiberius' words are problematic in their own right, since they contradict the impression he has given about how members of the Imperial house are to be treated:

referendum iam animum ad firmitudinem, ut quondam divus Iulius amissa unica filia, ut divus Augustus ereptis nepotibus abstruserint tristitiam. nil opus vetustioribus exemplis, quotiens populus Romanus cladis exercituum, interitum ducum, funditus amissas nobilis familias constanter tulerit. principes mortales, rem publicam aeternam esse. (*Ann.* 3.6.2–3)

(They should recall their minds to strength, just as *divus Julius* had once suppressed his sadness after losing his only daughter, and *divus Augustus* when his

²³ Gonzalez 1999, 128; Severy 2000, 320–1.

²⁴ Tiberius sends others (*Ann.* 3.2.1) instead of joining the funeral procession himself, a contrast with his personal involvement in the funerals of Augustus (Dio 56.31.3) and Drusus (*Ann.* 3.5.1; Dio 55.2.1; see Woodman and Martin 1996, 100; Swan 2004, 44).

grandsons had been snatched away. There was no need for older examples—all the times the Roman people had borne with constancy their armies' disasters, the destruction of generals, noble families utterly lost. Princes were mortal, the state eternal.)

Tiberius' reminder about human mortality is a commonplace in consolation literature, but combining the topos with the immortality of the state is more unusual.²⁵ His words are paralleled in a speech where Livy's Scipio, suffering from an illness, similarly contrasts his own mortality with the immortality of the *res publica* (Livy 28.28.11)²⁶ and imagines himself and other Scipiones as part of a litany of illustrious commanders (Livy 28.28.12 *praeclaris imperatoribus*) who were willing to step in and serve the state when a previous general died. Tiberius evokes a similar sentiment by recalling the many deaths of illustrious men that have occurred throughout Roman history: in the past, when generals and soldiers died in battle, the Roman people did not grieve immoderately, and there has always been a ready supply of citizens to fill the shoes of those who perished, as his allusive plurals (*exercituum, ducum, nobiles familias*) imply. Yet that sentiment is more appropriate to the Republic than the principate: Tiberius' Rome, in which access to military glory is strictly controlled by the emperor, cannot claim to have a similarly ubiquitous supply of *principes*, and the death of an heir (for Germanicus is no ordinary *dux*) has serious consequences for the *res publica*. There are others who could take his place as heir,²⁷ but since Tacitus implies that Livia and Tiberius perhaps took a role in disposing of previous "mortal princes" (Gaius and Lucius Caesar, *Ann.* 1.3.3; Agrippa Postumus, 1.6.2; Germanicus himself, 3.16.1), Tiberius' reassurances sound insincere.²⁸ Furthermore, Tiberius unwittingly belies his assertion that leaders are mortal by referring to his predecessors Julius Caesar and Augustus as *divi*: these *principes*, Tiberius' own adoptive father and grandfather, are dead, but that does not make them *mortales*.²⁹ We are implicitly reminded that we are not in Scipio's world: normal topoi of consolation do not straightforwardly apply to an Imperial house whose members are deified, especially when its human members may have political motivations for hastening each other's mortality.

Tiberius' disingenuous assertion stands in stark contrast to the sincere grief and traditional rituals of mourning with which the people of Italy commemorate Germanicus. During the return of his remains to the city, reminiscent of a funeral procession,³⁰ grief is expressed through typical funerary practices: the

²⁵ Cf. Schoonhoven 1992, 175, on *Cons. Liv.* 367; see also passages cited by Woodman and Martin 1996, 109. On the eternity of Rome see Pratt 1965, 26–30; material cited at Woodman 1977, 133–4.

²⁶ Cf. also Cic. *Att.* 9.10.3, *Marcell.* 22.

²⁷ Levick 1976, 157–8 refers to the children of Germanicus and Drusus.

²⁸ Cf. Häussler 1965, 264.

²⁹ For the sentiment, cf. Sen. *Cons. Marc.* 15.2.

³⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 85.

wearing of black (*Ann.* 3.2.2) and the *trabea*; the burning of clothes, perfumes, and other burial gifts; and offerings to Germanicus' *manes*.³¹ These are spontaneous actions not mandated by official decree: magistrates of the towns through which the cortège passed are specifically invited by Tiberius to participate (3.2.1), but the other responses are voluntary and motivated by actual grief. Tacitus specifically asserts their genuineness: "For flattery was absent, since everyone knew that it was being poorly covered up that Germanicus' death was joyful for Tiberius" (3.2.3 *aberat quippe adulatio, gnaris omnibus laetam Tiberio Germanici mortem male dissimulari*).³² Tiberius' obvious happiness means that the mourners gain nothing by expressing grief. Their sincerity is an admirable rarity in a society where commemorations of members of the Imperial family have typically been characterized by flattery and ingratiation, but this distance between the emperor's reaction and that of the populace suggests that sincerity may have its drawbacks.

These drawbacks become more explicit in Tacitus' description of events on the day of Germanicus' interment in the Mausoleum of Augustus, where the assembled throng

concidisse rem publicam, nihil spei reliquum clamitabant, promptius apertiusque quam ut meminisse imperitantium crederes. nihil tamen Tiberium magis penetravit quam studia hominum accensa in Agrippinam, cum decus patriae, solum Augusti sanguinem, unicum antiquitatis specimen appellarent versique ad caelum ac deos integram illi subolem ac superstitem iniquorum precarentur.

(*Ann.* 3.4.1–2)

(kept shouting that the state had collapsed and there was no hope left—too readily and openly for one to believe that they remembered those who commanded them. Nevertheless, nothing struck Tiberius to the core more than the arousal of men's enthusiasms for Agrippina, since they called her the glory of the fatherland, the only blood of Augustus, and the sole embodiment of ancient times; and, turning to heaven and the gods, they prayed that her offspring should be unharmed and should survive those who wished them ill.)

The Romans' lament for Germanicus and enthusiasm for Agrippina are framed in terms of memory and forgetting. Germanicus is not the emperor, yet the people's outcry suggests they believe he personifies the state, much as

³¹ Black clothing: Cic. *Vat.* 30–2; Toynbee 1971, 46. *Trabea*: Furneaux 1896, 397; Ogilvie 1965, 164. Funeral gifts: Toynbee 1971, 50; Woodman and Martin 1996, 86 and evidence there cited. Perfumes: Pliny *HN* 12.83; Mart. 11.54 with parallels cited by Kay 1985, *ad loc*; van Dam 1984, 148. *Manes*: Cumont 1949, 32 and passages there cited (n. 6); Scheid 1993, 197. The honors Tacitus describes mirror what epigraphical evidence reveals was officially decreed (wearing of *trabea*: *Tab. Heb.* 57; wearing of black and worship of *manes*: *Tab. Siar.* 2a.1–5; *Tab. Heb.* 59–62).

³² Compare the sincerity here with adulatory responses to later deaths in the Imperial family: 14.13, 14.64.3, 15.23.3.

the health of the emperor was often identified with the safety of the *res publica*.³³ Yet given all the problems in Germanicus' character that Tacitus has revealed, the rabid fervor that attaches to him seems misplaced: a man so thoroughly ignorant of Roman religious memory cannot really embody all that is good about the *res publica*. Tacitus deploys the language of memory (*meminisse*) in pointing out the effect this was likely to have on the actual emperor: in commemorating Germanicus, the Roman people forget that it is really Tiberius and Livia who are in charge³⁴ and what their attitude is likely to be. Not unlike Germanicus himself, then, his mourners are blind to his religious faults and also out of step with the contemporary political situation. The prayers³⁵ to the gods on behalf of Agrippina and her children suggest that they are the repository of the hopes once attached to Germanicus. Agrippina is seen as a living link to the past, an embodiment of the memory not only of her ancestor Augustus, but also of the more distant past (*antiquitas*), and the onlookers pray that the gods, by preserving her and Germanicus' offspring, will perpetuate that embodied memory into Rome's future. Again, language usually reserved for discussing the emperor's well-being is applied not to Tiberius himself, but also to his relatives: the adjective *superstes* commonly appears when a subject prays that an emperor, as the repository of all that is good in the state, should outlive him.³⁶ Applying these words to Agrippina could anger Tiberius, with whom this commemorative fever for Agrippina and her offspring secretly rankles; but evidently no one considers that the emperor might react in anger. The people's outpouring of support for Agrippina, when it comes up against Tiberius' detachment and secret joy at Germanicus' death, could spell destruction for her and her children.³⁷ This error in judgment is accompanied by factual error: their assertion that Agrippina is the last of Augustus' bloodline is evocative, but untrue, since Julia and Drusus are still alive.³⁸

So the people's lament that the *res publica* has died with Germanicus is problematic not just because Germanicus has been such a dubious character, but for practical reasons, too: it angers Tiberius and shows disregard for Agrippina and her children and what might happen to them as a result of their extravagant commemoration that angers Tiberius. The language of commemoration continues in the next chapter, describing popular reactions to Germanicus' impoverished funeral which lacks the traditional elements for memorializing the dead (*Ann.* 3.5.2); Tiberius' response to those rumblings (3.6) indicates that the kind of commemoration the Roman people are used to

³³ Versnel 1980, 464–7; Woodman and Martin 1996, 96; Clauss 1999, 323–4.

³⁴ For Tiberius and Livia as the referent of the plural *imperitantium*, see Woodman and Martin 1996, 96.

³⁵ On prayer-like language in the passage, see Woodman and Martin 1996, 98.

³⁶ e.g. *Sen. Cons. Polyb.* 9.7; see Versnel 1980, 567–8.

³⁷ Cf. Walker 1952, 125.

³⁸ Woodman and Martin 1996, 97, 100.

will not be appropriate here. Because Tiberius is emperor, the way Tiberius wants people to remember Germanicus has to be the right one, even if the populace has not quite embraced that reality.

Germanicus' death has an even greater effect upon Piso, whose experiences in its aftermath are similarly characterized by an ignorance of the political consequences of commemoration, and by conflict with Tiberius. Tacitus makes clear that Piso does not behave blamelessly, yet the way that his trial proceeds suggests a worrying tendency to behave worshipfully toward the emperor. The result is a further development in the question of politics and the Imperial cult that Tacitus raised in his account of the *maiestas* trials of *Annals* 1.

The dynamics of interaction between Piso and Tiberius are set up at the end of *Annals* 2. Piso engages in suspicious cultic behavior when he first learns of Germanicus' death: "After receiving this news intemperately, he slaughtered victims and approached the temples, not moderating his joy" (*Ann.* 2.75.2, *quo intemperanter accepto caedit victimas, adit templa, neque ipse gaudium moderans*). These ritual actions, Tacitus implies, stem from poorly concealed joy at Germanicus' demise: Piso's sacrifices frame Germanicus' death as a favor done to him by the gods which requires their thanks. While they do not constitute an actual religious violation, they are in poor taste, and they show his misunderstanding of the relationship between sacrifice and the health of members of the Imperial family. Piso's sacrifices of thanksgiving upon Germanicus' demise are perhaps his own twisted version of the more proper *supplicationes* for Germanicus' good health that he interrupted at 2.69.2.

As a commemoration of the dead Germanicus, Piso's sacrifices of thanksgiving are closer to what Tiberius himself is feeling than are the sincere and extravagant laments of the populace. Yet in the narrative of Piso's trial that follows, he and the emperor are decidedly on opposite sides: Piso is portrayed as a religious offender over whom Tiberius, godlike in his superiority, sits in judgment. Piso's trial thus recalls *maiestas* trials from *Annals* 1–2, particularly that of Libo Drusus, in that Piso adopts the stance of suppliant to Tiberius, who is cast as an impassive and distant god. Much as Libo Drusus was forced into a suppliant posture of praying to Tiberius (2.29.2),³⁹ the language of prayer runs like a thread throughout Piso's trial as well: when his case is referred to the emperor, Piso must beg (*Ann.* 3.10.3 *hinc preces*) for his life, and even Livia must beseech Tiberius on behalf of Plancina.⁴⁰

Tiberius himself perpetuates the religious tenor of Piso's language in his own speech during the trial, an oration which Tacitus duly describes as

³⁹ See §1.5, pp. 53–4.

⁴⁰ *Ann.* 3.15.1 *secretis Augustae precibus veniam obtinuit*, "She obtained pardon thanks to the secret prayers of Augusta;" 3.17.1 *matris preces*, "his mother's prayers;" 17.4 *ob preces Augustae*, "on account of Augusta's prayers."

“balanced” (3.12.1 *meditato temperamento*), but which is also “decidedly ambivalent.”⁴¹ Tiberius says that if Piso is found not to have killed Germanicus, he will refrain from “aveng[ing] private enmities with the force of a *princeps*” (*privatas inimicitias non vi principis ulciscar*). “But,” he goes on, “if a crime is uncovered which ought to be avenged in the case of the slaughter of any mortal at all, you must grant deserved consolations to Germanicus’ children and to us his parents” (*sin facinus in cuiuscumque mortalium nece vindicandum detegitur, vos vero et liberos Germanici et nos parentes iustis solaciis adficite*). Tiberius’ claim that Germanicus is to be avenged only as much as “any mortal at all” in similar circumstances appears laudable; but within the larger context of how Tacitus has framed his response to Germanicus’ death, the reader has reason to doubt Tiberius’ sincerity on that point. The word *mortalium* is universalizing,⁴² but the notion of a separation between mortal *principes* and the *res publica* also reactivates the problems of Tiberius’ words of consolation at *Ann.* 3.6.3. Tiberius has not made it sufficiently clear that *principes* really are no different from any other *mortales*; despite paying lip service to that idea, he has only gradually, and in a limited and ineffective way, attempted to restrict commemorative rituals in Germanicus’ honor that are in some cases far beyond what ordinary *mortales* could expect, leaving some ambiguity in the minds of his subjects about what is proper for non-deified members of the Imperial family. And Tiberius, by mentioning vengeance, knowingly or unknowingly opens the way for further religious expressions of grief and outrage at Germanicus’ death.

Tiberius also activates the language of ritual correctness when he laments the necessity of displaying Germanicus’ naked body “to be handled by the eyes of the crowd” (*Ann.* 3.12.4 *contrectandum vulgi oculis*) as the public looks for signs of poisoning. The phrase recalls *adtrectare feralia* (*Ann.* 1.62.2), the words Tiberius used to criticize Germanicus’ handling of the bones of Varus’ legions, as if he is trying to evoke a similar feeling of “ritualistic horror.”⁴³ In criticizing Piso’s accusers for stirring up an impious public, greedy for signs of foul play, Tiberius implies that allowing the *vulgus* to paw at Germanicus’ body with their eyes is equivalent to a religious violation. So although he emphasizes Germanicus’ mortality and criticizes Piso’s opponents, Tiberius’ rhetoric leaves the door open for a religious interpretation.

The religious language Tiberius uses to talk about Germanicus’ death steers the trial in a religious direction, as Piso’s accusers respond in kind when making the charges against him. In addition to criticisms of Piso’s tenure as *legatus* in Spain (*Ann.* 3.13.1) and charges of revolutionary behavior and hostility to Germanicus and his friends (3.13.2), there are also accusations of

⁴¹ Woodman and Martin 1996, 140.

⁴² Cf. Gell. *NA* 13.29 with Holford-Strevens 2005, 136.

⁴³ Woodman and Martin 1996, 148.

illicit magical rituals: “Finally, he had destroyed Germanicus himself with curses and poison; hence the rites and abominable offerings on the part of himself and Plancina, his seeking the state with weapons, his defeat in battle—all with the end result that he could be pursued as a defendant” (3.13.2 *postremo ipsum devotionibus et veneno peremisse; sacra hinc et immolationes nefandas ipsius atque Plancinae, petitam armis rem publicam utque reus agi posset, acie victum*). The accusers assume that Piso’s sacrifices and seditious activities offer sufficient proof that he poisoned Germanicus (*hinc*). This is certainly faulty logic. Tacitus himself has made sure to maintain ambiguity about Piso’s responsibility for Germanicus’ death, stating only that Germanicus *believed* Piso had poisoned and cursed him (cf. *Ann.* 2.69.3). Piso’s sacrifices may be evidence only of a disregard for appearances, an ignorance of how his behavior after Germanicus’ death could be interpreted.⁴⁴ But for the accusers, once irreligious is always irreligious: Piso’s sacrifices, which they cast as actually impious (*nefandas*) rather than simply in poor taste, mark him as the kind of person who would certainly also have turned to black magic to bring down his rival. Similarly, they say that his attempt to seize control was destined to fail so that he could be brought to trial;⁴⁵ the fact that he has been delivered into their hands as if by destiny, they say, indicates his guilt. Despite Tiberius’ plea that Piso’s trial should be handled with *modestia* (3.12.7), the accusers’ attacks are characterized by a focus on “old and irrelevant” (3.13.1 *vetera et inania*) material, and by “similar zeal and much eloquence” (3.13.2 *consimili studio et multa eloquentia*) when they turn to accusations of bias and religious misconduct and use illogical flights of fancy to “prove” Piso’s guilt. The accusers defy Tiberius’ ostensible wishes as expressed in his speech (3.12), but in fact they are responding perfectly to that speech’s subtext. Tiberius’ plea for a moratorium on discussions of poisoning, which he cast as impious (3.12.4), is actually formulated so as to imply that further investigation of the question was in fact needed (*adhuc*; gerundive *scrutanda*). His rhetoric of mortality, vengeance, and impiety has been seized upon by Piso’s accusers, who use similarly religious language to assert that Piso’s nefarious sacrifices are enough to prove his guilt in the matter of Germanicus’ death.

In his suicide note, Piso reveals his understanding of Tiberius’ religious discourse and its consequences when he addresses the emperor with language of prayer and worship:

deos immortalis testor vixisse me, Caesar, cum fide adversum te neque alia in matrem tuam pietate; vosque oro liberis meis consulatis...eo impensius precor ne meae pravitatis poenas innoxius luat. per quinque et quadraginta annorum

⁴⁴ In the *SCPP* (62–3, with Woodman and Martin 1996, 155), the sacrifices are taken as evidence only of his delight at Germanicus’ death, not his culpability in causing it.

⁴⁵ For this implication of the *ut*-clause, see Woodman and Martin 1996, 156; cf. Nisbet 1923, 30.

obsequium, per collegium consulatus quondam divo Augusto parenti tuo probatus et tibi amicus nec quicquam post haec rogaturus salutem infelicis filii rogo.

(*Ann.* 3.16.3)

(I call the immortal gods to witness that I have lived with faith toward you, Caesar, and with no different a devotion to your mother. And I beg you, have thought for my children... I therefore pray all the more immoderately that an innocent should not pay the penalty for my wickedness. By my forty-five years of obedience, by my onetime sharing of the consulship with you, I, approved of by your parent the divine Augustus, and a friend to you, who will never ask for anything again, beg you for the safety of my unfortunate son.)

Although he claims to call on the gods (*testor*), he is also beseeching Tiberius (*oro*),⁴⁶ and Piso's plea displays other hallmarks of the language typically used in prayers to divinities: the vocative *Caesar*, and the *Du-Stil* of *te... tuam*. Drawing attention to his *pietas* toward Livia, Piso employs another prayer topos by reminding Tiberius, the "god" in this scenario, of his past piety toward his family as an incentive for assistance.⁴⁷ The plural *vos* embraces Tiberius, Livia, and the gods, all of whom have the same power over Piso's children. He reinforces this devotion to the Imperial house by praying (*rogo*) that his son should not pay the penalty (*luat*) for his own crimes,⁴⁸ and by referring to the deified Augustus, combined with more *Du-Stil* language (*tuo... tibi*). This language of worshipful devotion takes on a malevolent cast from its juxtaposition with the oral tradition certifying that Tiberius put Piso up to the murder of Germanicus, a report which Tacitus is unwilling to credit, but feels he must not pass over since it is upheld by old-timers who remember Piso's trial (3.16.1);⁴⁹ Tacitus avoids tainting his authorial persona with the sensationalist subject matter, while also providing the reader with a grim example of the form that *pietas* and *fides* to the Imperial house might in extreme cases take. Piso's prayers to Tiberius are a manifestation of the toxic relationship between ruler and ruled in Imperial Rome.

The question of Plancina's involvement provides a further opportunity for Tacitus to show the effects of religious discourse in Piso's trial. Tiberius' reference to Livia's role in securing Plancina's acquittal sparks ire against Livia and Tiberius:

pro Plancina cum pudore et flagitio disseruit, matris preces obtendens, in quam optimi cuiusque secreti questus magis ardescebant. id ergo fas aviae, interfectricem nepotis adspicere, adloqui, eripere senatui. quod pro omnibus civibus

⁴⁶ For *orare* and *testari* in prayers, see Appel 1909, 64, 67; Hickson 1993a, 46–7, 114.

⁴⁷ See Appel 1909, 149–52; Hickson 1993a, 10–11; Furley and Bremer 2001, i.56–7.

⁴⁸ *Luere* and its compounds have religious overtones related to expiation: see Livy 10.28.13; OLD s.v. *luo* 1–3; Lennon 2014, 35–6. For *rogare* in prayers, see Appel 1909, 66.

⁴⁹ For this as a strategy of authentication, see *Ann.* 15.41.1 and Woodman and Martin 1996, 169 on *Ann.* 3.16.1; Marincola 1997, 99–101.

leges obtineant, uni Germanico non contigisse. Vitellii et Veranii voce defletum Caesarem, ab imperatore et Augusta defensam Plancinam. proinde venena et artes tam feliciter expertas verteret in Agrippinam, in liberos eius, egregiamque aviam ac patrum sanguine miserrimae domus exsatiaret. (3.17.2)

([Tiberius] spoke for Plancina ashamedly and disgracefully, giving as an excuse the prayers of his mother, against whom the secret complaints of all the best men blazed out more strongly: so it was right (they said) for a grandmother to look upon, speak with, and snatch away from the senate the murderess of her grandson! What the laws obtained for all citizens had not applied to Germanicus alone. Germanicus had been mourned in the voice of Vitellius and Veranius, but Plancina had been defended by the commander and by Augusta. Accordingly, let her turn against Agrippina and against her children the poisons and skills that had been so felicitously tested, and satiate that excellent grandmother and uncle with the blood of a most wretched house.)

Even the best citizens (*optimus quisque*) seem to be influenced by the all-consuming passion for Germanicus that so overwhelmed the entire populace in 2.82. Their first complaint refers to the ritual impurity associated with looking directly at murderers;⁵⁰ in interceding for Plancina, they imply, Livia is exposing herself to religious pollution. Yet their criticisms are only valid if Piso and Plancina actually *are* complicit in the murder of Germanicus: there is no ritual pollution involved in Livia looking Plancina in the face unless she actually gave him poison, something which Tacitus himself has made sure to leave in doubt.⁵¹ So the language of religious pollution once again represents an assumption about what has actually happened which may or may not be correct; this time, Piso himself is not the impious poisoner (as at 3.13.2), but the pollution of murder accrues to Livia.⁵² The sarcastic *feliciter* has religious overtones, too. Plancina's alleged magic was certainly not *felix*, since it did not "bring good luck" (*OLD* 2) to Germanicus, nor would it to Agrippina and her children.⁵³ Both public discourse and private rumor are being tainted by religious language of guilt, pollution, and expiation in cases where such language may not actually be appropriate to describe the situation. Furthermore, these critics are troubled more by the Imperial house's alleged machinations than by Vitellius and Veranius' accusations: their charges employed religious argumentation to make a logical leap from Piso's religious indiscretions to his guilt, but in the critics' eyes, this counts as merely "lamenting"

⁵⁰ Cf. Eur. *Heracl.* 1159–62 and *IT* 1218 (with Parker 1983, 110 and 371); Lennon 2014, 96–7.

⁵¹ Tacitus describes Tiberius' intercession for Plancina as a disgrace, which suggests that the degree to which he was subject to his mother's influence reflects badly on him as *princeps* (Woodman and Martin 1996, 179). This does not imply that Plancina was actually involved in Germanicus' death, a question that remains open (*contra* Koestermann 1963, 447–8).

⁵² See Lennon 2014, 98–100 for examples of ritual pollution for the person responsible for the murder, rather than the actual slaughterer.

⁵³ Syme 1958, 755: the word is not frequently used by Tacitus, "because [it] was associated with official prayers or professions."

Germanicus. Senate and emperor seem to be focusing on the wrong problems (Piso's involvement in tasteless sacrifices; how to inscribe the dead Germanicus into the city's ritual calendar), and even the best citizens are not entirely on the right track. Religious thought and argumentation are being directed toward the goal of accusations, convictions, and secret yet ineffective complaints; the problems that arose with the onset of the *maiestas* disease (1.73.1) have not abated.

The senators' responses to Piso's conviction show that the other disease, *adulatio*, is growing, too. Tiberius attempts to stem the tide of flattery and ensure that Piso is commemorated in appropriate ways. He prevents Piso's name from being stripped from the consular *fasti* (*Ann.* 3.18.1) so that he is not completely excised from Roman memory. Yet Tiberius is not completely successful in combating senatorial excess:

atque idem, cum Valerius Messalinus signum aureum in aede Martis Ultoris, Caecina Severus aram ultioni<s> statuendam censuissent, prohibuit, ob externas ea victoria<s> sacrari dictitans, domestica mala tristitia operienda. addiderat Messalinus Tiberio et Augustae et Antoniae et Agrippinae Drusoque ob vindictam Germanici grates agendas omiseratque Claudii mentionem. (3.18.2–3)

(And when Valerius Messalinus had proposed a golden statue in the temple of Mars the Avenger, and Caecina Severus had proposed that an altar of Vengeance should be set up, Tiberius prohibited it, saying that those things were vowed for foreign victories, but that domestic evils had to be covered up out of sadness. Messalinus had added that thanks should be given to Tiberius, Antonia, Agrippina, and Drusus on account of the avenging of Germanicus—and had omitted mention of Claudius.)

Tiberius' rejection of Messalinus'⁵⁴ and Caecina's proposals hits all the right notes. The temple of Mars Ultor probably was meant to commemorate vengeance over the Parthians rather than over Caesar's murderers.⁵⁵ In proposing additions to it after the execution of another Julio-Claudian's "murderer," however, Messalinus and Caecina seem to be applying a different interpretation that brings purely private vengeance strongly into the public sphere.⁵⁶ The altar to *Ultio* also recalls the "sacrifice" of German troops proposed by Germanicus' soldiers (2.13.1),⁵⁷ a problematic way of framing the killings that becomes even more worrisome when applied to the suicide of a Roman citizen. But Tiberius' good-faith attempts to distinguish between foreign and domestic vengeance (3.12.1) have done little good, for Messalinus, not cowed by his proposal's failure, immediately proposes giving thanks to members of the Imperial family. The wording Tacitus uses (*grates* rather than

⁵⁴ He is known for "say[ing] what he thinks Tib. wants to hear" (Woodman and Martin 1996, 189); cf. *Ann.* 1.8.4, 3.34.2–5.

⁵⁵ Weinstock 1971, 128–32; Zanker 1988, 194–5; Rich 1998, 79–97.

⁵⁶ Cf. Woodman and Martin 1996, 113.

⁵⁷ Woodman and Martin 1996, 189.

gratias agere) was typically used for giving thanks to the gods rather than humans;⁵⁸ Messalinus' proposal of a thanksgiving ceremony for the Imperial family thus perhaps suggests a worrying inability to distinguish between them and the gods.

It is little wonder that Tiberius' attempt to finally settle the Piso affair falls short, failing either to stop people from demanding vengeance for Germanicus' death or to curb the general trend toward using religious honors as rewards for members of the Imperial house or those who aid it. It is Tiberius who proposes granting priesthoods (*sacerdotia*) to three of Piso's prosecutors in a meeting of the Senate shortly after the trial's conclusion (*Ann.* 3.19.1). Rather than simply bestowing the priesthoods directly, Tiberius refers the matter to the Senate (*Caesar auctor senatui fuit*), thereby following the appropriate and traditional procedure; but given the nature of his relationship with the Senate, it is not clear that they actually have the power to resist his wishes.⁵⁹ Elsewhere, Tacitus indicates his opinion of giving priesthoods to accusers: in the prologue to the *Histories*, where he enumerates the horrific manifestations and consequences of the civil wars he is preparing to describe, the awarding of priesthoods, political offices, and Imperial favor to *delatores* is singled out for particular mention (*Hist.* 1.2.3).⁶⁰ Tacitus there refers to the priesthoods (*sacerdotia*) as *spolia*, a word which usually describes booty taken from a defeated opponent on the battlefield (*OLD* s.v. *spolium* 2); this implies a shameful similarity between the *delatores*' legal activity and war, as if they were attacking their own fellow citizens and collecting spoils from them. As a historian who relies heavily on his priestly persona, Tacitus may well have disapproved of the notion that being a *delator* (a class of people for whom the *Annals* indicate he feels nothing but disgust) made one worthy to occupy priesthoods like the quindecimvirate, his own tenure of which was clearly a source of personal pride.⁶¹ Thus, although rewarding important senators with priesthoods was generally an unproblematic prerogative of the emperor and an important way of showing Imperial patronage,⁶² it seems that Tacitus wants to communicate disapproval of the practice, at least in cases such as this, where the state cult and Tiberius' personal desire for vengeance collide in problematic ways.

After Tiberius rewards (and, in Fulcinus Trio's case, admonishes) Piso's prosecutors, a line is drawn under the case, but absolute finality is not achieved:

⁵⁸ Adams 1973, 134; Woodman and Martin 1996, 191.

⁵⁹ Millar 1977, 357; Talbert 1984, 345–6.

⁶⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 193; Damon 2003, 93. For the evidence for offices granted as a reward for prosecution, see Rutledge 2001, 46–7.

⁶¹ See §0.2, pp. 14–15, on *Ann.* 11.11.1.

⁶² Gordon 1990, 220–3; Várhelyi 2010, 57–9.

is finis fuit ulciscenda Germanici morte, non modo apud illos homines qui tum agebant etiam secutis temporibus vario rumore iactata. adeo maxima quaeque ambigua sunt, dum alii quoquo modo audita pro compertis habent, alii vera in contrarium vertunt, et gliscit utrumque posteritate. (*Ann.* 3.19.2)

(That was the end of avenging Germanicus' death, which was discussed in varying rumor not only among those people who were alive at the time, but even in subsequent periods. So true is it that the greatest things are ambiguous, as some consider the things they hear (however they hear them) to be confirmed, while others turn the truth into its opposite, and each grows with posterity.)

The declaration of an end to *ultio* recalls Tiberius' similar assertion, in his letters recalling Germanicus, that vengeance had been won for Varus' slaughter (2.26.3 *quoniam Romanae ultioni consultum es<se>t*, a passage where *ultio* also has religious overtones).⁶³ But despite Tiberius' attempt to end the discussion, rumor continues to debate the issue for years to come.⁶⁴ Despite Tiberius' efforts, the question of vengeance remains open and remains paramount in popular memory of the episode. Although Tiberius was able to prevent an insertion of Germanicus into the cultic memory surrounding Mars Ultor, the ambiguities and partisan feelings that determined the course of events in Piso's trial will nevertheless be forever enshrined in cultural memory, thanks to this popular talk Tiberius fails to dispel. Germanicus' death will be remembered as the case that could not be closed, if only because posterity is guilty of insufficient rigor in its evaluation of the truth. Despite the dedications and declarations with which Tiberius and the senators attempt to publicly proclaim that *ultio* has been satisfied, the way the affair is remembered suggests otherwise.

In the midst of the reports of senatorial *adulatio*, the changes to religious memory which it drives, and Tiberius' failure to solidify the memory of Germanicus' death, Tacitus uses Claudius' omission from Messalinus' proposal of thanksgiving to members of the Imperial family (*Ann.* 3.18.4 *omiseratque Claudii mentionem*) as an opportunity for a disquisition on the role of *fortuna* in determining the Imperial succession:

mihi quanto plura recentium seu veterum revolve, tanto magis ludibria rerum mortalium cunctis in negotiis obversantur. quippe fama spe veneratione potius omnes destinabantur imperio quam quem futurum principem fortuna in occulto tenebat. (*Ann.* 3.18.4)

(The more I consider recent or ancient events, the more apparent to me the mockeries of mortal affairs in all sorts of business become. For in terms of reputation, hope, and veneration, everyone was being marked out for command except the man whom fortune was keeping in hiding as the future *princeps*.)

⁶³ On the passage, see §1.6, pp. 58–60.

⁶⁴ Cf. Clarke 2002, 94.

Thrown into Tacitus' account of Piso's trial as if it were an aside, the statement seems on the face of it to have little place here; but the language of fortune that Tacitus deploys here in fact has an important historiographical point to make. The notion of humans as fortune's plaything is not uncommon, and Tacitus uses similar language of *fortuna* and its fickleness as a way of discussing the alternation of emperors in the *Histories*.⁶⁵ But in the context of Piso's trial and its troubling undercurrents, the motif has special point. In elevating Claudius, *fortuna* works against human attempts to elevate other members of the Imperial family and particularly against the worshipful attitudes that have been displayed toward various princes. For the methods by which "everyone" other than Claudius has been distinguished in the *Annals* include support that borders on worship (*veneratione*; OLD s.v. *veneratio* 1a),⁶⁶ an outgrowth of the worshipful language that has been directed at Tiberius himself. But *fortuna* has other plans. Humans' worshipful adulation of the Imperial house that threatens to pull Roman religious ritual in a dangerous direction cannot ultimately triumph over the will of capricious supernatural forces.

Tacitus' observation on the role of *fortuna* in affairs is not necessarily comforting news for a reader seeking to understand how and why things happen. Koestermann claims Tacitus sees fortune's activity as "shocking" (*schokkierend* [sic]), since it highlights his "helplessness" (*Ratlosigkeit*) when confronting the unpredictability of human affairs.⁶⁷ Yet it is perhaps possible to see things differently: *fortuna* may offer a corrective to the corrosive human behaviors that seek to shape the course of the principate. Just because the actions of *fortuna* are contrary to mortals' expectations does not necessarily mean they are random, with no larger purpose. There is nothing in the phrase *ludibria rerum mortalium* to suggest randomness; just because *fortuna* may be laughing at our expense does not mean she is doing so for no particular reason.⁶⁸ Fortune's joke, in this instance, is that human *fama*, *spes*, and *veneratio* were eventually revealed to have been pointing in the wrong direction: the joke is on us because *Claudius*—not Germanicus, or Drusus, or anyone else who seemed in AD 20 to be a likely candidate—was going to become *princeps* all along. This may be a point where the Roman reader would "code-switch" into the "language" of cult worship, where *fortuna* is often

⁶⁵ Koestermann 1963, 451; Woodman and Martin 1996, 192 on *ludibrium*, for which compare Livy 30.30.5, with Levene 1993, 75. See also §2.6, p. 113.

⁶⁶ Tacitus frequently uses *venerari* (for which see OLD s.v. *veneror* 1, 2: "to pay homage to (persons, esp. rulers regarded as quasi-divine)") and related words to describe worship of the gods (e.g. *Germ.* 35.3; *Hist.* 4.58.6, 5.5.4; *Ann.* 3.63.3, 14.61.1) and members of the Imperial house (e.g. *Ann.* 4.37.3, 12.42.2, 14.13.1, 15.74.3).

⁶⁷ Koestermann 1963, 451.

⁶⁸ *Ludibrium* (OLD s.v. *ludibrium* 1b, "playful or frivolous behaviour or an instance of it") could suggest fickleness or volatility; but when used with an objective genitive, as here, it suggests "insulting treatment, mockery, derision" (OLD s.v. *ludibrium* 3a) deliberately directed at a particular person or thing.

viewed as providential, a goddess at whose shrines oracles could be consulted by worshippers hoping to get a glimpse into the future.⁶⁹ Certainly *fortuna* is providential for Claudius himself, in keeping him alive and hidden until his unforeseen chance would come. Yet Tacitus does not here reveal what indeed *fortuna* may have had in mind for Rome in doing this. *Fortuna* can sometimes be “a force aligned with the justice of the gods,”⁷⁰ so there is a possibility that it has it in mind to punish the Romans in some way by elevating Claudius to the throne. Indeed, Tacitus’ readers would probably be primed to think in this direction already: given the hostility of the historical tradition to Claudius, the reader is likely to have assumed he would be ineffective, problematic, and destructive to Rome in Tacitus’ portrayal as well, an expectation that will be rewarded when the reader arrives at the Claudian books of the *Annals*.⁷¹ The notion of *fortuna* as an agent of divine punishment will be stated more explicitly when the reader arrives at *Ann.* 4.1.1,⁷² but it may be that Tacitus is laying the groundwork for that idea here.

So if Claudius can be seen as divine *fortuna*’s punishment of Rome, for what misdeed, exactly, is Rome being punished? There have certainly been many instances of religiously problematic behavior in the *Annals*: Germanicus’ bloodthirsty rhetoric of divine anger and human sacrifice, Tiberius’ use of *divus Augustus* to advance himself politically, his neglect of traditional religious interpretations and expiation mechanisms, and his subjects’ worshipful treatment of members of the Imperial family. The context of *Ann.* 3.18.4 (especially *veneratione*) suggests that the latter may be what Tacitus primarily has in mind, but the question is left open. Fortune’s mockery of humans is thus twofold: not only does she elevate the one man no one thought would become *princeps*, but that elevation, when it comes around, will also turn out to be a punishment. *Fortuna* is the one force that can defeat the religious adulation of mankind, but the person she puts in place instead will have his reign marred by prodigies indicating even more clearly that the gods are angry with Rome (12.43, 64).⁷³ If Rome wishes to find a way out of this morass of bad religious behavior, Claudius will not be the answer.

Tacitus offers historiography and memory as a means of learning to overcome these difficulties of interpretation, highlighting his own activities as rememberer and structurer of events. With *revolvere*, Tacitus, building on the image of Fortune’s wheel, “perhaps imagines himself as spinning backwards that which fortune has already spun forwards,” correcting the errors of the interpreters of the time, but also indicates it is his “replay[ing] mentally” the

⁶⁹ Matthews 2011, 10 (code-switching), 25–6, 136 (oracles at temples of a providential *fortuna*).

⁷⁰ Matthews 2011, 141.

⁷¹ Martin 1981, 144–5; Malloch 2013, 7.

⁷² See §4.2.

⁷³ On these passages, see §6.5, pp. 269–71, 275–7.

events of the past that allows him to draw this conclusion about *fortuna*.⁷⁴ Claudius' elevation to the principate came as a surprise at the time, and it can only be understood with the benefit of hindsight and by doing the active work of memory: that is, by reimagining the past. This only serves to highlight the degree to which Tiberian Rome is blinded by the worshipful treatment constantly directed at the Imperial family. The trio of *fama*, *spes*, and *veneratio* is expended by humans in entirely the wrong direction, highlighting their emptiness and futility in the face of larger causative forces. Tacitus has the distance not to let them cloud his vision.

3.3 POLICING TRADITIONS: THE *FLAMEN DIALIS*

The remainder of *Annals* 3 sharpens Tacitus' focus on the issues, raised in his account of Piso's trial, of unusual religious honors directed at members of the Imperial family, and of resulting flattery. In the narrative of the years AD 21 and 22, immediately following Piso's trial, Tacitus devotes the bulk of his attention to senatorial matters, with the general intention of highlighting the Senate's inability to make any true achievement by its debating.⁷⁵ This is nowhere more true than in two episodes that show Tiberius and the Senate confronted with crucial questions relating to ritual and memory: whether the *flamen Dialis* may leave Italy in contravention of strict traditional rules governing his conduct (*Ann.* 3.58), and whether certain sanctuaries in the Greek East should be allowed to retain their rights to grant asylum (3.60–3). Interwoven with these discussions are proposals that would honor Drusus with *tribunicia potestas* (3.56, 59), and rituals performed after Livia's sudden illness (3.64). This interplay of questions about the Imperial family and questions about the Roman Empire's longstanding religious traditions allows Tacitus to show the progressing changes in the dynamic of cultic memory under Tiberius. The material about Drusus and Livia sets discussions about ritual strongly in the context of the principate, in which honors for the living members of the Imperial family must occupy the Senate's time as much as Rome's venerable traditions of worship. Furthermore, the nature of the discussions of traditional matters that do still occur (about the *flamen Dialis* and about temple asylum) leaves the reader in doubt as to whether Rome is really capable of resolving its ritual questions anymore.

Although the proposal put forward by Maluginensis, the *flamen Dialis*, will be the focus of my discussion, it is important that Tacitus contextualizes that proposal by juxtaposing it with a discussion of honors for Drusus, giving

⁷⁴ Woodman and Martin 1996, 192.

⁷⁵ Ginsburg 1981, 85, 88.

a window onto the dynamic between emperor and senate. Just before Maluginensis makes his proposal, Tacitus reports a letter from Tiberius, requesting that the Senate grant Drusus *tribunicia potestas*:

sed principio litterarum veneratus deos, ut consilia sua rei publicae prosperarent, modica de moribus adulescentis neque in falsum aucta rettulit. esse illi coniugem et tres liberos eamque aetatem, qua ipse quondam a divo Augusto ad capessendum hoc munus vocatus sit. (*Ann.* 3.56.3–4)

(But after praying to the gods at the beginning of his letter, asking that they might further his plans for the state, he gave reports of the youth's qualities that were modest, not exaggerated to the point of falsehood: he had a wife and three children, and was the same age at which he himself was formerly called by the divine Augustus to take up this duty.)

Tiberius' letter strikes a humble note: his address to the gods uses language typical for prayers and rituals,⁷⁶ and Tacitus admits that he does not exaggerate Drusus' qualifications. But Tiberius also hints that with this request, he is paving the way for Drusus to rise to an even higher position eventually. While the most obvious referent of *hoc munus* is the *tribunicia potestas*, the language recalls Tiberius' speech about his own rise to Imperial power at the time of his accession (1.11.1), raising the possibility that *munus* refers not just to *tribunicia potestas* but to the position of *princeps*.⁷⁷ The two speeches are also united by reference to *divus Augustus*. Then, Tiberius claimed that only *divus Augustus* was capable of ruling the empire (1.11.1), but he now invokes the *divus*' name without diffidence, casting Drusus in the role of recipient, and himself as the bestower, of honors which had once belonged to *divus Augustus*. Praying to the gods to smile upon his *consilia* (perhaps including his plans for the Imperial succession) and making pious reference to *divus Augustus* dress a request about Imperial power in the language of cult.

The senators' response is revelatory, too: "The fathers had mentally anticipated the speech; therefore their flattery was the more deliberate. Nevertheless, nothing was devised except the decreeing of images of the princes, altars of the gods, temples, arches, and other customary things" (*Ann.* 3.57.1 *Praeceptorant animis orationem patres; quo quaesitior adulatio fuit. nec tamen repertum nisi ut effigies principum, aras deum, templa et arcus aliaque solita censerent*). *Repertum* suggests senators desperately striving for innovative methods of flattery but coming up with nothing besides what was already conventional: commemorating Drusus' elevation with honorific statues and arches, and particularly with structures related to religious ritual. All of this has been

⁷⁶ Koestermann 1963, 530; Woodman and Martin 1996, 418. For *veneror* in prayers, see Appel 1909, 67; Hickson 1993a, 50.

⁷⁷ Woodman and Martin 1996, 418 enumerate the verbal similarities between the two passages; cf. also *Ann.* 1.7.7 *vocatus*.

tried before.⁷⁸ Tacitus' damning summary *aliaque solita* reveals his tedium at this behavior: their proposals are simply "clichés too tedious to enumerate in full."⁷⁹ What is perhaps most problematic is that the Senate appears completely attuned to Tiberius' desires: it knows what he will request before he can even verbalize it, and it holds its *adulatio* at the ready to anticipate his desires.

This interaction appropriately prepares the reader for the proposal from the *flamen Dialis*, coming about the same time as the letter about Drusus.⁸⁰ The debate that ensues gets to the heart of the issue of tradition and innovation in cult, and how that balance is affected by the principate. The basic question is to what extent, and for what reasons, it is ever possible to depart from the traditional rules governing the conduct of ritual in Roman religion, which form the core of Roman cultic memory.⁸¹ According to a traditional interpretation, alterations to such ritual details would have the potential to destabilize the *pax deorum* and draw down the wrath of the gods upon Rome; but Tiberius' subjects, living in an era of religious amnesia, seem determined to test the limits of this principle. The debate is also a battle of authorities: the priestly authority of Tiberius, the *pontifex maximus*, is pitted against that of another priest, the *flamen Dialis* Servius Maluginensis,⁸² who asks for a proconsular governorship of Asia. This is problematic because of the notoriously restrictive rules on the *flamen's* conduct: he was subject to many strict ritual taboos, one of the most important of which was a prohibition on his absence from the city of Rome for a period longer than three days.⁸³ While there is evidence that Romans could, and did, occasionally relax or overlook some priestly prohibitions in the name of practicality (as with the restriction on priests' contact with dead bodies discussed in Chapter 2), the *flamen Dialis'* presence in Rome was evidently not a rule subject to bending.⁸⁴ The prohibition on travel is an essential part of the important role of the *flamen Dialis* in upholding the *pax deorum* in Rome. He is described as "celebrating every day" (Gell. NA 10.15.16 *cotidie feriatus*), meaning that he had to be available to perform certain rites in the city at any moment when they might be demanded of him. Thus, while holding a consulship at the same time as the flamine was

⁷⁸ e.g. 2.41.1, 2.83.1. See also Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 147.

⁷⁹ Woodman and Martin 1996, 420; cf. Vielberg 1987, 99–100. Dio 42.19.3, 51.19.3 lists honors ending with similarly dismissive formulae (τὰ τε τοιούτοτροπα, "and such things"/καὶ τὰλλα τὰ τοιούτοτροπα, "and other such things").

⁸⁰ *Inter quae* (Ann. 3.58.1); see Woodman and Martin 1996, 422.

⁸¹ See §0.1.

⁸² On his priesthood, see Rüpke 2008, 638.

⁸³ Gell. NA 10.15.14. Vanggaard 1988, 64 reasonably hypothesizes that the same prohibition on leaving the city once applied to the other *flamines*, but that the rule had been relaxed and by AD 22 only the *Dialis* was still prohibited.

⁸⁴ See §2.3, p. 86. Stepper 2003, 162 notes that the prohibition on leaving Rome was always non-negotiable, whereas leeway was occasionally granted when it came to some of the other ritual restrictions on the *flamen Dialis*.

not problematic, taking up a proconsular governorship afterwards would be in direct conflict with the prohibitions of his priesthood.⁸⁵

Maluginensis tries his best to explain away this problem and bases his argumentation on his priestly authority and the base of knowledge about Roman religious traditions he has acquired as the result of his position.

Inter quae provincia Africa Iunio Blaeso prorogata, Servius Maluginensis flamen Dialis ut Asiam sorte haberet postulavit, frustra vulgatum dictitans non licere Dialibus egredi Italia neque aliud ius suum quam Martialium Quirinaliumque flaminum: porro, si hi duxissent provincias, cur Dialibus id vetitum? nulla de eo populi scita, non in libris caerimoniarum reperiri. saepe pontifices Dialia sacra fecisse si flamen valetudine aut munere publico impediretur. quinque et septuaginta annis post Cornelii Merulae caedem neminem suffectum neque tamen cessavisse religiones. quod si per tot annos possit non creari nullo sacrorum damno, quanto facilius afuturum ad unius anni proconsulare imperium? privatis olim simultatibus effectum ut a pontificibus maximis ire in provincias prohiberentur: nunc deum munere summum pontificum etiam summum hominum esse, non aemulationi, non odio aut privatis adfectionibus obnoxium. (*Ann.* 3.58)

(During this time, when tenure of the province of Africa was prolonged for Junius Blaesus, Servius Maluginensis the *flamen Dialis* demanded to be allotted Asia, saying over and over that a false report had been spread that it was not lawful for *Diales* to leave Italy, and that his right was no different from that of the *Martiales* and *Quirinales*; moreover, he said, if they had taken provinces, why was that forbidden to *Diales*? There were no plebiscites about this, nothing was discovered in the books of ritual matters. The *pontifices* had often completed the rites of the *Dialis* if the *flamen* were prevented by ill health or public service; for seventy-five years after the slaughter of Cornelius Merula, no one had been appointed in his place, and yet the rites had not ceased. But if it were possible for no selection to be made for so many years with no damage to the rites, how much easier would be his own absence for a proconsular command of a single year? Formerly, private rivalries had made it so that *flamines* were forbidden to go to the provinces by the *pontifices maximi*: but now, thanks to a gift of the gods, the supreme pontiff was also the supreme man, unaffected by rivalry, hatred, or personal feelings.)

Maluginensis makes a show of his priestly learning in claiming there are no relevant precedents for the *Dialis* among the body of religious literature and law with which he as a priest is familiar, basing his argument on certain books that preserve the details of *caerimoniae* (a buzzword for the strict traditional restrictions governing the *flamen's* conduct).⁸⁶ He seems to mean that there

⁸⁵ Maluginensis had been suffect consul in AD 10 (Rüpke 2008, 638), apparently without issue. For examples of similar power struggles in the Republican period, see Rüpke 1996; Wardle 1998 on Val. Max. 1.1.2; van Haepelen 2002, 101–2; Thomas 2005, 120–5; Rüpke 2012c, 179–82.

⁸⁶ On the meaning of *caerimonia*, see Ch. 2 nn. 69 and 81. See also Vanggaard 1988, 88; cf. Gell. NA 10.15.1, 17–18; Serv. Aen. 4.302. On the contents, organization, and uses of the priestly *commentarii*, see North 1998; for Cicero's similar appeal to them in *de Domo Sua*, see MacRae 2016, 66–8.

were no previous plebiscites dealing with the *flamen Dialis* specifically, “so there was no ‘case history’ to which an appeal could be made.”⁸⁷ In the absence of any explicit prohibition on proconsular governorships, Maluginensis compares himself to the other *flamines* associated with the worship of Mars and Quirinus, who (he claims) *were* allowed to leave Rome to govern provinces. Yet here he seems to be twisting religious memory to give an incomplete picture of these customs and rules to get his way. Furthermore, his *argumentum ex silentio* is problematic: since he himself claims that his own *ius* is no different from that of the *Martialis* or *Quirinalis*, surely it would follow that the historical record should be scoured to find precedents for members of *those* two priesthoods attempting to leave the city. Such cases were indeed known, most famously that of consul and *flamen Martialis* Postumius Albinus, prevented by the *pontifex maximus* Lucius Metellus from leaving Rome for a military campaign in 242 BC (Livy 37.51.1–2, Val. Max. 1.1.2).⁸⁸ The incident was famous in antiquity and, indeed, is precisely the precedent Tiberius will cite to reject Maluginensis’ claim to the proconsulship (Ann. 3.71.3). Perhaps Maluginensis is simply ignorant of this and other similar incidents, in which the outcome nearly always followed the traditional prohibition.⁸⁹ It is difficult to evaluate Maluginensis’ claim that there was no difference among the three kinds of *flamines*, and his assertion that these previous cases were motivated by enmity on the part of the *pontifex maximus* (3.58.3 *privatis . . . simultatibus*) could be correct,⁹⁰ but he fails to offer proof by citing specific precedents, as Tiberius will do to support his position.

In lieu of proof, he flatters the emperor by stating that his pontificate is the gods’ gift to mortals, and that Tiberius himself, much like a god, is above the squabbles to which mere mortals are prey.⁹¹ The precedents that accrued over hundreds of years for preventing other *flamines* from abandoning their posts for governorships are dismissed as personal animosities, to which the principate, Maluginensis claims, has put an end. This shows a striking disregard for the ritual importance attached to the *flamen*’s prohibition from leaving Rome. Maluginensis shows the extent to which he misunderstands the traditional and

⁸⁷ Woodman and Martin 1996, 423.

⁸⁸ Valerius Maximus would have been alive at the time of Maluginensis’ request; see Briscoe 1993, 398–402.

⁸⁹ See also Livy 37.51.1–6 (with Levene 1993, 89–90), where *flamen Quirinalis* Quintus Fabius Pictor (also praetor) is prevented from leaving for Sardinia; Livy compares the consul Postumius Albinus being prevented from setting out for Sicily on religious grounds in 242 BC. The same decision was made in the case of Flaccus, the *flamen Martialis* in 131 BC (Cic. *Phil.* 11.18; cf. Livy 40.42.8–10, with Briscoe 2008, 518).

⁹⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 423. It is unknown whether the three flamines were always bound by the same restrictions; Serv. *Aen.* 8.552 indicates that the *flamen Dialis* was more heavily restricted. On political motives for conflicts between *pontifices maximi* and *flamines* see Bleicken 1957; Richard 1968, 790–1; Rüpke 1996, 269–71; Stepper 2003, 167–8.

⁹¹ Woodman and Martin 1996, 425.

ritual significance of having a physically present *flamen Dialis* when he makes the argument that Rome went without one for 75 years. Maluginensis refers to Cornelius Merula, the last person to hold the priesthood before him, a partisan of Cinna who committed suicide in 87 BC upon the Marians' return to Rome; after Merula's death, no replacement *flamen Dialis* was elected until Augustus gave the post to Maluginensis himself in 14 BC.⁹² Even if, as Maluginensis claims, the rites were nevertheless observed carefully during this period, the lack of a *flamen Dialis* is still not necessarily as unproblematic as he implies: considering the years of civil war and bloodshed that followed, one could argue that many terrible things befell Rome after the office of the *flamen Dialis* became vacant in 87 BC. Maluginensis is thus looking back to a recent period during which Rome's religious system was widely regarded to have been broken, and when Roman affairs were not in a good state; taking a time when Roman cult did not properly function and the gods were consistently angry as if it were an acceptable, normal state of affairs shows his striking lack of awareness.

Maluginensis' claim ultimately is not upheld: after a delay, Tiberius as *pontifex maximus* refuses his request to go to Asia. This would seem to indicate that Tiberius, in keeping the *flamen Dialis* inside the walls of Rome, is upholding traditional religious norms, but the arguments he actually makes point in a different direction:

et quoniam de religionibus tractabatur, dilatatum nuper responsum adversus Servium Maluginensem flaminem Dialem prompsit Caesar recitavitque decretum pontificum, quotiens valetudo adversa flaminem Dialem incessisset, ut pontificis maximi arbitrio plus quam binotium abesset, dum ne diebus publici sacrificii neu saepius quam bis eundem in annum; quae principe Augusto constituta satis ostendebant annuam absentiam et provinciarum administrationem Dialibus non concedi. memorabaturque L. Metelli pontificis maximi exemplum qui Aulum Postumium flaminem attinisset. ita sors Asiae in eum qui consularium Maluginensi proximus erat conlata. (*Ann.* 3.71.2–3)

(And since discussions were being had about religious practices, Caesar produced a response to Servius Maluginensis the *flamen Dialis* that had recently been delayed, and recited a decree of the *pontifices*: the *flamen Dialis*, whenever ill health befell him, could be absent for more than two nights at the discretion of the *pontifex maximus*, provided that it was not on days of public sacrifice nor more than twice in the same year. He said that the decisions that had been made in Augustus' principate were sufficient proof that *Diales* were not granted year-long absence or the administration of provinces. Also brought to mind was the example of Lucius Metellus the *pontifex maximus*, who had held back the *flamen* Aulus Postumius. Thus the allotment of Asia was conferred upon the man who was the next of the ex-consuls after Maluginensis.)

⁹² Hoffman Lewis 1955, 30, 74; Bowersock 1990, 392–3; Rüpke 2008, 638.

Although Tiberius' argument is in line with cultic memory, he bases that argument not on the weight of Roman tradition, but on a proclamation of Augustus limiting absences on the part of the *flamen Dialis*. The best reasoning Tiberius can offer is *not* based primarily on the details of religious practice as they have been preserved continuously throughout the Roman past, but on Augustus' interpretation of those rules, which he claims is such a strong precedent that no other is necessary. Immediately thereafter, Tiberius *does* forge further back into time, to cite the famous example of Aulus Postumius and L. Metellus.⁹³ This seems designed to refute Maluginensis' claim that the other *flamines* could hold governorships with impunity; even if the *flamen Dialis* were not a special priestly case held to higher standards than the other *flamines*, Maluginensis was wrong in asserting that it was unproblematic for *any* of Rome's major priests to depart from Rome. So although Tiberius can make arguments that draw on tradition, and can find good traditional precedents that show Maluginensis is wrong, the *first* support that he cites—and the only one he thinks is really necessary—is the decisions once made by Augustus. Augustus has become the only authority Tiberius needs,⁹⁴ and that entails a certain “amnesia” of what constitutes acceptable religious practice. Although in this particular case the end result is in line with Rome's age-old cultic memory (in that Tiberius *does* uphold traditional rules about the *flamen Dialis*), by showing us that Tiberius' argumentation rests entirely on Augustus, Tacitus gives us an idea of the difference the principate has made to Rome's religious system. The authority of a recent emperor is now worth more than the long weight of tradition.

Also worrying is the way the discussion has taken place, for the course of events leading up to Tiberius' response to Maluginensis suggests that he has other priorities that take precedence over pronouncing decisions on such religious questions. When Maluginensis makes his proposal, there is no answer right away:

Adversus quae cum augur Lentulus alique varie dissererent, eo decursum est, ut pontificis maximi sententiam opperirentur. Tiberius dilata notione de iure flaminis decretas ob tribuniciam Drusi potestatem caerimonias temperavit, nominatim arguens insolentiam sententiae aureasque litteras contra patrium morem. recitatae et Drusi epistulae, quamquam ad modestiam flexae, pro superbissimis accipiuntur. huc decidisse cuncta, ut ne iuvenis quidem tanto honore accepto adiret urbis deos, ingrederetur senatum, auspicia saltem gentile apud solum inciperet. bellum scilicet, aut diverso terrarum destineri, litora et lacus Campaniae cum

⁹³ North 1998, 50 suggests that Tiberius cites the precedent of Augustus because it would have taken too much effort to actually read the priestly *commentarii* for older examples of *flamines'* contested activities; the example of Postumius was so famous that Tiberius may have known of it independent of the priestly *commentarii*.

⁹⁴ On Tiberius' use of Augustan precedent in the *Annals*, see Cowan 2009.

maxime peragrantem. sic imbuti rectorem generis humani, id primum e paternis consiliis discere. (*Ann.* 3.59)

(When the augur Lentulus and others expressed various opinions in response to this [i.e. Maluginensis' request], they had recourse to waiting for the opinion of the *pontifex maximus*. Tiberius, delaying the enquiry about the *flamen's* right, moderated the observances that had been decreed on account of Drusus' tribunician power, finding specific fault with the unusualness of the proposal and with the golden letters as being contrary to ancestral custom. And the letter of Drusus that was read out, although modulated toward modesty, was received as extremely haughty: everything had fallen to such a low point, people said, that not even after receiving such a great honor would the youth approach the city's gods, enter the Senate, or even undertake the auspices on his native soil. Of course it was the war! Or he was kept from them by a distant land!—wandering all over the shores and lakes of Campania at that very moment. That was how the helmsman of the human race was getting his feet wet, that was the first thing he was learning from his father's counsels.)

Tacitus explicitly mentions that Lentulus is an augur, highlighting his role as a religious expert.⁹⁵ This implicitly suggests, even before consensus on Maluginensis' request has been reached, that there are in fact legitimate religious reasons to object to it: if the holder of another of Rome's traditional priesthoods feels compelled to express a different opinion, that casts doubt upon Maluginensis' extensive arguments. Yet a detailed and considered response to those arguments is delayed. The Senate's decision to defer the question until the opinion of the *pontifex maximus* can be consulted is certainly in keeping with the traditional operation of the Roman religious establishment, since the *pontifex maximus* held ultimate authority over the *flamines* and other *pontifices*.⁹⁶ But Tiberius, who is both emperor and *pontifex maximus* and is therefore responsible for making that determination, puts off expressing an opinion. Reserving judgment in order to weigh all appropriate factors and give the question proper consideration rather than arriving at a decision hastily could certainly be a mark of wise and effective leadership. But Tiberius' delaying comes off rather as detachment, an attempt to deflect and avoid the question. When approached as *pontifex maximus*, Rome's ultimate religious expert, Tiberius shifts the topic of conversation back to the adulatory honors for Drusus. The Romans are waiting on a religious expert, who then waits to make a decision. And he waits a long time, for the issue will not be resolved until *Ann.* 3.71, and even then it looks like an afterthought, appended to a discussion of the temple of Fortuna Equestris (cf. 3.71.2 *quoniam de religionibus tractabatur*).

What is most remarkable about Tiberius' delaying tactics is how readily the senators accept his change of direction and fall to criticizing Drusus: soon, no one is saying a word about Maluginensis' proposal. The golden apple of

⁹⁵ Rüpke 2008, 637.

⁹⁶ Vanggaard 1988, 57; van Haepere 2002, 96; Rüpke 2014, 235.

strife that Tiberius throws into the senators' midst is the golden lettering in which Haterius proposes that the decree of *tribunicia potestas* for Drusus should be inscribed upon the Curia (*Ann.* 3.57.2). The proposal reeks of flattery. Senatorial decrees and other legal documents were typically inscribed on metal tablets for the material's symbolic value, when the documents' creators wanted to emphasize the permanence of the texts, which would be forever preserved in memory thanks to the lasting nature of the material;⁹⁷ by proposing golden lettering, Haterius may also have in mind the religious significance of gold.⁹⁸ Tiberius' attempt to stop this flattery, which would inscribe the decree of *tribunicia potestas* for Drusus in Roman memory using precious metals upon one of Rome's most important buildings, is certainly laudable; but the context, in which his objection is apparently used to distract the Senate from its objections to a more problematic alteration to Roman cultic memory, is a worrying misdirection. Indeed, the language Tacitus uses shows the senators adopting Maluginensis' discourse of godlike aloofness. Maluginensis had described Tiberius as not "subject" (3.58.3 *obnoxius*) to personal passions and animosities, using vocabulary which can signify exposure to wind and storm.⁹⁹ Similarly, the senators in their criticism of Drusus now describe him sarcastically as the "helmsman of the human race" (3.59.4 *rectorem generis humani*), activating the imagery of sailing.¹⁰⁰ But *rector* can also be used of a god (*OLD* s.v. *rector* 4b) and recalls how in Maluginensis' flattery, Tiberius, "the highest pontiff and also, by a gift of the gods, the highest of mankind" (3.57.4), is said to be far removed from the buffetings of normal human passions. Even when used sarcastically in a critical description of Drusus as pottering about in the pleasure grounds of Campania, the vocabulary of Imperial power remains unquestioned. The description of Drusus' honors as *caerimoniae*, "observances,"¹⁰¹ the same word Maluginensis used to describe the strictures of his office (3.58.1), similarly emphasizes how honors granted to the Imperial family overshadow traditional religious concerns. This is all the more puzzling given that some of the senators' objections to Drusus' conduct are religious. The fact that he has sent letters to the Senate instead of appearing in person arouses senatorial ire, expressed in religious terms: why does he not come to Rome's gods, take his tribunician auspices on Rome's soil?¹⁰² Drusus' flouting of a Roman

⁹⁷ On the permanence attributed to bronze as a material for legal inscriptions, see Williamson 1987, 169.

⁹⁸ *Aureae litterae* may refer to an entire tablet made of gold (so Furneaux 1896, 460, comparing a silver stele preserving a speech of Nero (Dio 61.3.1)), or to a bronze tablet with gilded lettering (Williamson 1987, 166 n. 23, who also comments on the religious significance of gold in such contexts; for *aureus* meaning "gilded," see *OLD* s.v. *aureus* 2).

⁹⁹ *OLD* s.v. *obnoxius* 3b.

¹⁰⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 427–8.

¹⁰¹ On *caerimoniae*, see Ch. 2 nn. 69 and 81, and this chapter, n. 86.

¹⁰² On tribunes' auspices, see Lintott 1999, 103. The *tribunicia potestas* constitutionally enabled Augustus to retain his *auspicia urbana* after refusing a consulship, "the most profound and decisive innovation of the principate" (Dalla Rosa 2003, 243–4).

religious tradition seems to cause much more consternation among the senators than Maluginensis' much more serious attempts to deviate from cultic traditions. That the senators are exercised about Drusus' neglect of traditional practice is laudable from the point of view of preserving cultic memory, but it blinds them to the way language has shifted to describe members of the Imperial house almost like gods.

3.4 TEMPLE ASYLUM: THE SENATE AND CULTIC MEMORY

If the confrontation between Tiberius and Maluginensis exposes the fault lines in the reception of cultic memory in Tiberian Rome, the report of senatorial business that immediately follows Drusus' elevation to *tribunicia potestas* (*Ann.* 3.60–3) makes fully and shockingly clear the degree to which both emperor and senate have lost their appreciation for Roman cultic and cultural memory. The issue up for discussion is the right of asylum offered at sanctuaries in the Greek East:¹⁰³ widespread abuse of the practice requires the Senate to evaluate the authenticity of sanctuaries' ability to grant asylum. The arguments made by the representatives of the various Greek states who come to defend their rights of asylum draw on myth, ritual, and history as evidence. Because the cities' arguments are so firmly grounded in the past, the episode invites reflection on the question of memory in Imperial Rome: when policies are to be made in the present based upon evidence of what happened in the past, what are (or should be) the criteria for deciding?

Tacitus' argument cannot be fully understood without evaluating the senatorial discussion about asylum rights from the point of view of cult and its relationship to memory. The main factors that seem to determine the validity of a sanctuary's asylum rights are (1) the authenticity of its purported connection to the gods; (2) whether that connection's authenticity has been recognized by the construction of buildings for cult worship and/or by decrees of asylum; and (3) how far back in time the recognition of a sanctuary's authenticity can be traced. The cultic context of the asylum debate allows the field of relevant enquiry to be pushed *very* far into the distant past: the present state of affairs is thought to depend directly on events from the mythical period. Also relevant is the role a sanctuary has played for its worshippers, and its relationship with mortal power structures, in the intervening period between its foundation and AD 22. Thus, in sorting through these communities' claims of asylum rights for their local sanctuaries, the

¹⁰³ For a survey of asylum in antiquity, see Rigsby 1996, 1–29; on our passage, Rigsby 1996, 580–6.

Senate is being called upon to perform a very complex and involved type of memory work.

Tacitus frames the current abuse of asylum rights as a misunderstanding and misuse of what is an essentially valid religious principle; it is a further example of the religious amnesia that characterizes the world of the principate. Yet from the beginning of the episode, Tacitus casts doubt on the Senate's ability to fix the problem, since its relationship with the emperor deprives it of real effectiveness. The asylum episode, therefore, is not just about the conflict between tradition and innovation, but also about that between Imperial autocracy and senatorial *libertas*.¹⁰⁴

Sed Tiberius, vim principatus sibi firmans, imaginem antiquitatis senatui praebebat postulata provinciarum ad disquisitionem patrum mittendo. crebrescebat enim Graecas per urbes licentia atque impunitas asyla statuendi; complebantur templa pessimis servitorum; eodem subsidio obaerati adversum creditores suspectique capitalium criminum receptabantur, nec ullum satis validum imperium erat coercendis seditionibus populi flagitia hominum ut caerimonias deum protegentis. igitur placitum ut mitterent civitates iura atque legatos. et quaedam quod falso usurpaverant sponte omisere; multae vetustis superstitionibus aut meritis in populum Romanum fidebant. magnaue eius diei species fuit quo senatus maiorum beneficia, sociorum pacta, regum etiam qui ante vim Romanam valuerant decreta ipsorumque numinum religiones introspectit, libero, ut quondam, quid firmaret mutaretve. (*Ann.* 3.60)

(But Tiberius, strengthening the principate's force for himself, allowed the Senate the semblance of olden times by sending the provinces' demands to the fathers' investigation. For throughout the Greek cities there was a growing lack of restraint and impunity in setting up rights of asylum: the temples were filled with the worst sort of slaves, and debtors were being sheltered against their creditors by the same protection, as well as those suspected of capital crimes, nor was there any authority strong enough to suppress the seditious activities of a people that protected men's disgraces as they would the ceremonies of the gods. Therefore it was decided that the states should send ambassadors with proof of their rights. And of their own free will, some abandoned their claims to what they had taken on falsely; many relied upon ancient superstitions or their services to the Roman people. And great was the spectacle of that day on which the Senate examined the benefactions of our ancestors, the pacts of allies, the decrees even of kings who had held sway before Roman power, and the cults of the divinities themselves—with freedom, as formerly, as to what it would strengthen or change.)

In some ways, the passage points to a reasonably positive view of the Senate and its activities, as Woodman and Martin have argued. Tacitus' language, they note, highlights the Senate's freedom to act and the debate's similarity to

¹⁰⁴ On *libertas*, see Wirszubski 1950, esp. 136–8 and 160–7; Oakley 2009.

how the Senate used to deliberate about similar questions in the past: *libero* emphasizes the Senate's independence in its decision-making (compared with, for example, the *adulatio*-driven proposal of the senator Haterius, 3.57.2), and *imaginem antiquitatis* and *ut quondam* point to the old-fashioned nature of the discussion.¹⁰⁵ With this in view, the words *species* and *imago* do not necessarily denote "some kind of charade or deception," but rather are "designed to accommodate the crucial qualification that the principate now exists;" Tacitus is being "not cynical but realistic."¹⁰⁶ In the Tiberian hexad, Tacitus shows the Senate involving itself in foreign affairs all too infrequently; this discussion of matters like treaties, foreign kings, and cults is an atypically traditional one,¹⁰⁷ and the space Tacitus devotes to it suggests he views it as an important demonstration of the Senate's powers. Perhaps by *species* Tacitus means "splendor" or "pomp:"¹⁰⁸ that the asylum episode was a rare and venerable spectacle worthy of the attention he gives it.

Yet despite these indicators of positivity, the "cynical" opening sentence of *Ann.* 3.60 contrasts strongly with the more positive judgment of the Senate's activities in the last sentence:¹⁰⁹ this opening primes the reader to understand the senators' old-fashioned-looking freedom (*libero, ut quondam*) as merely a mask or facade concealing the inescapable fact that the emperor is the true locus of power. That facade may be splendid and legitimately praiseworthy as an example of the Senate undertaking its traditional activities in a very traditional-looking way, yet this negative introduction colors our reading of the episode. The phrase *imaginem antiquitatis* recalls Tiberius' control of consular elections, engineered to provide an "image of freedom" (1.81.4 *libertatis imagine*) for a system that was bound to erupt into slavery (*servitium*), suggesting that the Senate's apparent independence here is similarly empty. Even more sinister is the notion that Tiberius was "strengthening the principate's force for himself," a phrase that must refer back to the previous chapter (3.59) in which Tiberius argued for elevating Drusus contrary to traditional practice.¹¹⁰ Tacitus may acknowledge the Senate's truly meritorious behavior, but he also depicts a world where the Senate mostly debates honors for the *princeps*' heir, and the free discussion of once-traditional matters (including religious questions) is now an exceptional, noteworthy occurrence.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Woodman and Martin 1996, 431. To Tacitus, *libertas* is the antonym of *adulatio* and related concepts (*obsequium, patientia*) that denote "fawning subservience" (Wirszubski 1950, 165). Similarly, *libertas senatus* "means that important matters of State shall be brought before the Senate, and that senators may freely express their opinions and vote without constraint" (Wirszubski 1950, 137).

¹⁰⁶ Woodman and Martin 1996, 431. See also Wirszubski 1950, 160–1.

¹⁰⁷ Ginsburg 1981, 88–92.

¹⁰⁸ OLD s.v. *species* 4a.

¹⁰⁹ Oakley 2009, 187 n. 15.

¹¹⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 432.

¹¹¹ Cf. Belloni 1984, 174.

Tacitus also makes it clear from the outset that the abuse of asylum rights is not merely a legal problem, but also a cultic one. His negative attitude to both the refugees and the authorities who fail to suppress them is clear from the vocabulary he uses to describe their activities;¹¹² this is similar to the negative vocabulary in the earlier complaints of C. Cestius that the asylum afforded by statues of the emperor was being similarly abused in Rome (3.36).¹¹³ What seems problematic is not the concept of divinely granted asylum, but rather its overuse and misapplication by the human representatives of the gods whose protection is being sought. Our sources for the historical application of asylum indicate that fleeing to the protection of a god does not automatically ensure protection from the law, since the god or his priest could refuse to shelter a fugitive.¹¹⁴ Tacitus' Greeks make no distinction between the real ritual protections that are rightly due to anyone who seeks shelter with the gods (*caerimonias deum*) and the ne'er-do-wells who abuse those protections (*flagitia hominum*), and this is what Tacitus seems to find problematic. The word *caerimoniae* that has surfaced and resurfaced in *Ann.* 3.58–9 crops up again: just as Tiberius does not seem to observe the difference between the faux *caerimoniae* of Drusus (3.59.2) and the real, traditional ones of the *flamen Dialis* (3.58.1), so these Greeks elide the difference between a religious precept and its flagrant abuse. Some Greek states also display a failure of religious acumen in the arguments they make in favor of their various claims to asylum rights, Tacitus says. A few of them, recognizing that their claims to asylum are thoroughly fraudulent, voluntarily retract them before the senatorial investigation even begins and are not included in the Senate's consideration, or in Tacitus' catalog of cities that follows in *Ann.* 3.61–2.¹¹⁵ Other cities hope that their claims will be upheld because of past service to the Roman Empire or because of the excessive devotion that their ancient cults inspire (*vetustis superstitionibus*); Tacitus' use of the word *superstitio* here, decidedly negative, indicates his views of their argumentation as being motivated by the wrong kind of religious scruple, dominated by excess, a long-standing and therefore entrenched failure of religious interpretation that is characteristic of Greeks.¹¹⁶

From the beginning of the debate, therefore, Tacitus gives the reader the distinct impression that these Greek states are not the best interpreters of religious questions: they are prone to assuming that their ancient, excessive

¹¹² The negative connotations of *pessimis* and *flagitia* are obvious. For *licentia*, see OLD s.v. *licentia* 2. Granting *impunitas* to crime is also negative at *Hist.* 2.69.1, 4.44.2.

¹¹³ Cf. the similar vocabulary *deterrimo cuique*, *licentia*, *impune*, *flagitia* at *Ann.* 3.36.1–2. Other scholars (Furneaux 1896, 463; Koestermann 1963, 536; Rigsby 1996, 580; Woodman and Martin 1996, 434) note the similarity in content without remarking on the verbal parallels.

¹¹⁴ Rigsby 1996, 10.

¹¹⁵ Herrmann 1989, 128.

¹¹⁶ See Grodzynski 1974, 81; Gordon 2008, 80; and see §1.1, p. 29. Scheid 1985, 22 and Davies 2004, 169 n. 85 argue that *superstitiones* should not be seen as negative, but this is out of keeping with its connotations elsewhere in Tacitus.

affection for the practice of asylum in the past is enough to guarantee that they should have the right in the future, and they are also prone to allowing that ancient tradition to be abused in the present. They are clearly not capable of performing the kind of religious memory work that is required, and it is up to the Senate to unravel these asylum claims by duly assessing the evidence of the sanctuaries' cultic and political past in order to determine their role in the present.

The Greek states' arguments all make use of cultural memory, in that their claims to the right of asylum are based on the significance of their sanctuaries in the past, but different communities look back into the past to different depths.¹¹⁷ For some cities, mythical or cultic memory seems the most important, and their arguments focus on their sanctuaries' distant mythical pasts.¹¹⁸ In other cases, historical memory plays a more prominent role, and the focus is on how other political powers throughout history have regarded each city's right of asylum. Ephesus' delegates use both kinds of argumentation, but emphasize the distant mythical past.¹¹⁹ Tacitus devotes more space to the Ephesians' argument than he does to that of any other community, indicating the importance he attaches to it. The Ephesians claim that Apollo once used their city (his birthplace) as a refuge from an angry Jupiter, an example which later inspired Liber to honor Ephesus as a place of asylum when he showed mercy to the Amazons at Apollo's altar (3.61.2). Hercules, too, recognized the site's importance by building a temple. Thus in the ancient, mythical period of Liber and Hercules, Ephesus (its delegates argue) already had an important place in cultic memory: even gods have recognized it as a venerable place of asylum. The three earthly powers of Persia, Macedon, and Rome also kept alive that cultic memory by recognizing Ephesus' right to grant asylum (*ius*, 3.61.2),¹²⁰ but the Ephesian delegates devote much less space (only two lines in the Teubner edition of the text) to discussing these three empires than they do to mythical material (nine lines). Their defense of their asylum rights is the one most thoroughly grounded in cultic memory: they can point to gods as the first asylum-seekers, the first asylum-granters, and the first temple-builders at Ephesus.

The other states, however, display a different kind of argumentation: their delegates tend to eschew the mythical past in favor of emphasizing the role their cities and shrines have played in Roman history. Four communities choose to name specific Romans who made decrees confirming their asylum rights in order to honor the city for its service to Rome. The Magnesians cite asylum rights from Scipio and Sulla in return for their assistance in the wars

¹¹⁷ See Kantiréa 2014, 432 for the Greeks' reliance on collective memory ("la mémoire collective").

¹¹⁸ Cf. Kantiréa 2014, 422 on Ephesus and Paphos.

¹¹⁹ See Kantiréa 2014, 420–1.

¹²⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 346.

against Antiochus and Mithridates;¹²¹ the Aphrodisians and Stratonicensians appeal to decrees made by Caesar and Augustus;¹²² and the Hierocaesarians name the Roman commanders Perpenna and Isauricus (while also noting a similar, earlier decree by the Persian king Cyrus).¹²³ Throughout, the Greek states show selectivity in deploying this political evidence. Several cities de-emphasize historical ties to Rome's enemies that could compromise their claim to "good deeds done toward the Roman people" (3.60.2 *meritis in populum Romanum*). The Ephesians sensibly omit their sanctuary's connections with Mithridates and Antony,¹²⁴ and Magnesia similarly downplays its sanctuary's ties (attested by inscriptions found in the temple complex) with Antiochus III.¹²⁵ Stratoniceia and Aphrodisias gloss over their connections with Sulla;¹²⁶ given Tiberius' general obsession with Augustan precedents, this is perhaps calculated to appeal to the emperor's predilections by emphasizing his own family's contribution in preference to events in pre-Julio-Claudian history. In all of these, the period before the Romans' arrival gets short shrift: Panhellenic decrees of asylum, which are known to have existed for several of these sanctuaries, are completely omitted from the delegates' arguments.¹²⁷ Only the distant past (myths, Persians) or the Roman period are important, and the period of history that falls in between those two time periods is not considered to provide proof of a sanctuary's importance.

The arguments adduced in favor of granting asylum to the shrine of Venus at Paphos in Cyprus particularly illustrate this selectivity: the envoys attribute the construction of the temple to King Aerias (*Ann.* 3.62.4), yet Tacitus himself, when discussing Titus' visit to the shrine in the *Histories*, devotes more space and emphasis to an alternative account of its foundation, a "more recent report" attributing the cult to Cinyras (*Hist.* 2.3.1 *fama recentior*).¹²⁸ An informed reader, who remembers Tacitus' account of the sanctuary's foundation in the *Histories* and knows that there are two possible versions of the sanctuary's foundation, will know that establishing the aetiologies of sanctuaries is more complex than the Cypriot delegation seems to acknowledge. How many other Asian cities, one might wonder, have similarly simplified or

¹²¹ Woodman and Martin 1996, 439 note that the language recalls formulae from documents, suggesting the ambassadors are quoting the decrees of Scipio and Sulla.

¹²² It is unclear from Tacitus' language whether both states had decrees from both Caesar and Augustus (so Rigsby 1996, 585). See also Woodman and Martin 1996, 440–1.

¹²³ Cf. Rigsby 1996, 438–9. ¹²⁴ Kantiréa 2014, 428.

¹²⁵ Rigsby 1996, 195–6 (no. 69); cf. 183.

¹²⁶ See App. *B Civ.* 1.97, with Reynolds 1982, 3–4; Rigsby 1996, 420–1, on a decree of Sulla (81 BC); Kantiréa 2014, 427.

¹²⁷ Rigsby 1996, 387. One example is the temple of Artemis Leucophryna in Magnesia (see Rigsby 1996, 185–279).

¹²⁸ On the passage, see Shannon 2014, 278–9. Aerias is not mentioned outside Tacitus (Ash 2007a, 81). For a historical survey of these Cypriot cults, see Mitford 1990, 2178–83, 2185–7, 2189–90.

misconstrued their sanctuaries' histories in an attempt to make arguments that will be more persuasive to the Senate? Tacitus' language emphasizes the difficulties of finding out the truth based on what these cities report: the use of the subjunctive verb *posuissent* (3.62.4) marks this out as a relative clause within virtual indirect discourse,¹²⁹ reminding the reader that this information about the founders of the sanctuaries is not being spoken in Tacitus' own words, but represents the claims being made by the ambassadors themselves. This information comes from the Cypriots directly, not (as in the *Histories* passage) as the result of Tacitus' own historical research. This reminds us that memory is always subjective: the accounts of the histories of all these sanctuaries are being relayed to the Senate by biased delegates trying to present the best possible versions of their own pasts to obtain honor for their communities.

Faced with this barrage of data drawn from the cultic memory of myriad Asian communities, the Senate's job is to sift and sort through it all and determine which states' claims are valid. Tacitus highlights the difficulty the senators have with this task:

Auditae aliarum quoque civitatum legationes. quorum copia fessi patres, et quia studiis certabatur, consulibus permisere, ut, perspecto iure et si qua iniquitas involveretur, rem integram rursum ad senatum referrent. (*Ann.* 3.63.1)

(Delegations were heard from other states as well. The Fathers, as they were exhausted by the abundance of these, and since the competition was being conducted enthusiastically, delegated everything to the consuls on the understanding that, after they had examined the cities' rights and assessed whether any irregularity might be involved, they would refer the entire matter back to the Senate.)

Even after some cities have willingly abandoned their requests for asylum (3.60.2), the amount of information that remains is still overwhelming. The senators, realizing they cannot cope, throw up their hands and pass the problem to the consuls.¹³⁰ This is a key moment in Tacitus' tracing of the downward trajectory of religion and memory in Rome. Even if Tacitus presents the asylum episode in a good light as an example of old-fashioned senatorial *libertas* in action, ultimately the Senate is not capable of performing its traditional duties: the sort of vigorous debate on matters of cultic observance that would once have characterized its day-to-day activities (cf. 3.60.3 *libero, ut quondam*) is something to which the senators are no longer equal.¹³¹ The passage also invites the reader to ponder the Greek states' motives in

¹²⁹ Cf. Furneaux 1896, 466.

¹³⁰ Cf. *Ann.* 3.52.2, where the Senate similarly resigns sumptuary laws to the emperor.

¹³¹ Woodman and Martin 1996, 433. Cf. Ginsburg 1981, 92, and Ginsburg 1993, 95–6 on the similarly ineffective debate at *Ann.* 3.33–4.

asserting their asylum rights: *studiis certabatur* reflects a straightforward competition where the bestowal of honor by Rome was an end in itself irrespective of any other (e.g. financial) benefits.¹³² Elsewhere, however, Tacitus uses the phrase *studiis certare* with connotations of partisanship or attempting to influence the emperor.¹³³ While the Greek states do “massage” the cultic and historical memory attached to their sanctuaries in an attempt to portray themselves in the best possible light vis-à-vis Rome, there is nothing in the content of their proposals (except perhaps with Aphrodisias and Stratoniceia) to suggest an attempt to flatter the emperor; the irony is that the Roman Senate can no longer cope with pure, unadulterated *studia* that do *not* focus on swaying the *princeps*. This kind of discussion, once traditional, is now so alien that they cannot move ahead with making any actual rulings.

Inconsistencies in the outcome of the discussion also cast some doubt on the Senate and consuls’ decision-making abilities in the area of cultic memory. It is unclear from the facts of the cases what exactly the difference is between the accepted and rejected claims:

consules super eas civitates quas memoravi apud Pergamum Aesculapii comperitum asylum rettulerunt: ceteros obscuris ob vetustatem initiis niti. nam Zmyrnaeos oraculum Apollinis, cuius imperio Stratonici Veneri templum dicaverint, Tenios eiusdem carmen referre, quo sacrare Neptuni effigiem aedemque iussi sint. propiora Sardianos: Alexandri victoris id donum. neque minus Milesios Dareo rege niti; sed cultus numinum utrisque Dianam aut Apollinem venerandi. petere et Cretenses simulacro divi Augusti. (*Ann.* 3.63.2–3)

(The consuls reported that beyond those cities which I have mentioned, asylum of Aesculapius at Pergamum had also been verified; the others, they said, relied on beginnings which were obscure due to their antiquity. For (they said) the Smyrnaeans told about an oracle of Apollo, on whose order they dedicated a temple to Venus Stratoniceis, and the Tenians told of a prophecy from the same god, by which they were ordered to sanctify a statue of Neptune and a temple. The Sardians (they said) discussed things that were nearer in time: their asylum had been a gift of victorious Alexander. Nor (they said) did the Milesians display any less reliance on King Darius; but the cults of the divinities each of them had to worship were Diana and Apollo respectively.¹³⁴ The Cretans also (they said) sought asylum rights for their statue of the divine Augustus.)

The Asclepieion at Pergamum had connections with Julius Caesar,¹³⁵ but if that is the reason why its claim for asylum is upheld, Tacitus does not say so. It is similarly unclear why the Apolline oracles telling Smyrna and Teos to

¹³² So Rigsby 1996, 22 (*contra* Meyer 1999, 462, who emphasizes the financial and political rewards of asylum).

¹³³ *Hist.* 1.90.3, on insincere support for Otho; *Hist.* 5.1.1, on partisanship for Titus; *Ann.* 11.23.2, on the admission of Gauls into the Senate.

¹³⁴ For the translation, cf. Woodman and Martin 1996, 445.

¹³⁵ See Rigsby 1996, 377–84, and nos. 180 (= Sherk 1969 no. 54) and 181; Kantiréa 2014, 428.

construct their temples should be thought any less trustworthy than the divine communication instructing the Ephesians to demarcate a sacred grove (3.61.1 *deorumque monitu sacratum nemus*). Sardis, whose claim is also rejected, refers to the granting of asylum rights by Alexander, a figure in the more recent past (3.63.3 *propiora*). This is strange, given that the consuls' criticism seems to be of proofs that are too *old* rather than too recent. Furthermore, if the Ephesians could appeal both to precedents from the mythical past and to the patronage of the same Alexander (3.61.2 *Macedonas*),¹³⁶ neither antiquity nor Alexander should be problematic as evidence. There are similar problems with Miletus' reliance on their grant of asylum by Darius: if this were too old to be good evidence, surely Hierocaesaria's citation of the precedent of Cyrus, a generation earlier, would have to be thrown out as well. It is unsurprising that the Cretans' request of *ius asyli* for a statue of Augustus is refused, given the problems with the practice of seeking asylum at statues of the emperor that Tacitus has already highlighted (3.36), but this also seems to fail the *vetustas* test. For Sardis and Smyrna, perhaps the problem is that these cities (unlike Ephesus and Hierocaesaria) do not mention past service to Rome, a lesson both cities will evidently take to heart in *Annals* 4 when they compete for the right to build a new temple related to emperor cult.¹³⁷ But in the other cases, it is much less clear why the requests are refused. The reader's resulting confusion again underlines how ill-equipped the Senate and consuls are to deal with the sheer weight of historical and religious evidence the Greeks bring to bear.

There is also a deeper problem lurking in Tacitus' description of the consuls' assessment: they claim that some cities' claims to asylum are too old to be valid. On the one hand, this is analogous to the topos, common in historiography, that some reports cannot be verified because they happened too long ago for there to be eyewitness testimony, or even reliable written records, on which a historian can draw to produce a truthful account.¹³⁸ Yet when it comes to matters involving the gods, the older a certain ritual or cult is, the more venerable and holy it is considered to be. This principle can hold true even for non-Roman religious traditions. Even the bizarre religious practices of the Jews, a people inherently repugnant and religiously depraved in the eyes of Tacitus, are slightly redeemed by the fact that they can be shown to be very old: "These rites... are defended by their antiquity" (*Hist.* 5.5.1 *hi ritus... antiquitate defenduntur*). If ancientness gives even Jewish practices a certain respectability, why should the claims of these far less problematic Asian communities to the right of asylum be dismissed on the grounds of being *too* old? The very principle of cultic memory would seem to demand

¹³⁶ This is an allusion to Alexander's control of Ephesus beginning in 334 BC (Woodman and Martin 1996, 437).

¹³⁷ *Ann.* 4.55.4, 4.56.1; see §4.4, pp. 196–9.

¹³⁸ e.g. Livy pr. 6. See also Marincola 1997, 117–27.

that the oldest claims demand the *most* respect: the longer a god's sanctuary has been granting the right of asylum, the more it would seem that claim should be perpetuated. But these consuls, in their concern for accuracy, overlook this important principle and turn one of the tenets of cultic memory on its head. The consuls are therefore not only inconsistent in how they evaluate different cities' claims, but they also demonstrate their failure or inability to give proper respect to the weight of tradition.

Confusion continues, since we are not told exactly what decision is made: "And decrees of the Senate were made, according to which, albeit with great honor, nevertheless a limit was prescribed. And they were ordered to fix bronzes on the temples themselves in order to sanctify the memory, and lest they should fall into self-interest under the guise of religious correctness" (*Ann.* 3.63.4 *factaque senatus consulta quis multo cum honore modus tamen praescriberetur, iussique ipsis in templis figere aera sacrandam ad memoriam, neu specie religionis in ambitionem delaberentur*). It is not clear, either from this concluding observation or from Tacitus' account of the preceding debate, whether *modus* implies a restriction on which communities would retain their asylum rights, limits on the criteria according to which the right of asylum could be extended, or perhaps even a delimiting of the extent of the physical area around each sanctuary on which an asylum-seeker would need to stand in order to receive asylum.¹³⁹ Tacitus' primary concern, then, is not to report straightforwardly the outcome of a petition to the emperor. Instead, the episode shows a picture of the varied pressures on both the Greeks and the Senate when dealing with issues of cultic memory, and the episode's inconclusiveness underlines the difficulty of reaching solid answers. In Tiberian Rome, the Senate is no longer capable of sifting and sorting through the rich, varied, and detailed religious history of the shrines of the Roman Empire.

Tacitus also draws our attention to the ability of the Senate to shape religious memory in the future: their decrees will stand as a reference in any future disputes about the right of asylum, so any decision made here will have a continuing effect on cultic practice in the Eastern Empire.¹⁴⁰ Depositing decrees in temples to guarantee their efficacy is a familiar Roman practice thought to put the decree under the protection of the god worshipped in that temple, who was now obligated to help enforce it.¹⁴¹ Bronze is a particularly appropriate material, given its perceived permanence and sacral connotations,

¹³⁹ Woodman and Martin 1996, 445–6. Rigsby 1996, 29 concludes that "the Senate ratified existing rights but forbade the creation of new asylums," but this interpretation seems designed to reconcile Tacitus' account with Suetonius' observation that Tiberius abolished asylum throughout the empire (*Tib.* 37.3); cf. Rigsby 1996, 586. *Ann.* 4.14.1–2 (on which see §4.3, pp. 174–5), where Samos and Cos petition for the right of asylum for their temples, does not make sense unless these rights of asylum continued to operate.

¹⁴⁰ See Kantiréa 2014, 436–8.

¹⁴¹ Culham 1989, 109–12.

well attested in both Rome and the provinces, including the Greek East.¹⁴² The phrase *sacrandam ad memoriam*¹⁴³ emphasizes a concern with preserving the decision in religious memory: the Senate's decrees imply that placing the documents in temples guarantees that they will be continually reread and considered by any community which might seek to exploit asylum rights in the future. *Ambitio* is thought to threaten the limits the Senate has placed on the right of asylum, which the Greek cities fiercely defended as though it were a competition (cf. *Ann.* 3.63.1 *studiis certabatur*), apparently believing that having a sanctuary with the right to grant asylum would be a way to distinguish oneself from rival cities. But the assumption that inscribing the Senate's decree is enough to constrain this *ambitio* is problematic for several reasons. It is unclear what will happen in the case of the temples whose asylum rights have not been judged to be sufficiently based on verifiable proof. Presumably the inscriptions will only be posted in temples whose asylum rights the Senate *does* approve;¹⁴⁴ this seems a plausible way to ensure *modus* is upheld in these locations, but how would that prevent people from backsliding "on the appearance of religious scruple" (*specie religionis*) at sites where no moderating decree was posted? And furthermore, there is no guarantee that the inscriptions will continue to be read. Placing such tablets in temples was not primarily intended to ensure that they would remain accessible to human worshippers and visitors; the concern was rather with forcing the gods to guarantee the laws or decrees the tablets displayed.¹⁴⁵ Their effectiveness in reactivating memory of the *senatus consulta* is predicated on the Greeks' continuing to read them, something that does not emerge clearly from the text.¹⁴⁶ The Senate and consuls have admirably attempted to impose some control on the exercise of asylum rights, but the heterogeneous evidence the Greeks present shows that there is considerable overlap between *religio* and *ambitio*: when provincials must look to Rome as the final arbiter of their religious issues,¹⁴⁷ there is perhaps little anyone could do to keep the one from subverting the other.

The engagement with religious memory in the asylum debate, therefore, is presented by Tacitus as a rare and welcome example of the Senate's return to its Republican roles, where it asserts its *libertas* to make decisions for the empire, but this apparently positive development is systematically undermined. The principate still casts its shadow: even as he allows the Senate to

¹⁴² Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.1; Williamson 1987, 175, 179–83.

¹⁴³ "Sacrare = 'enshrine' (*OLD* 3a) is from every point of view the appropriate verb" (Woodman and Martin 1996, 446). Note the reverse notion of *memoria* as a sanctifying process at Sen. *Suas.* 2.2 (*memoria sacravit*) and 6.5 (*memoria . . . te . . . sacratum dabit*).

¹⁴⁴ Woodman and Martin 1996, 446.

¹⁴⁵ Culham 1989, 112.

¹⁴⁶ Similar tensions are at work in Tacitus' account of the fire of AD 64 at *Ann.* 15.41 (see Shannon 2012). Written material tends to fall into irrelevance if it is not reintegrated into functional memory (A. Assmann 1999, 137).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Magie 1950, i.504; Rigsby 1996, 19, 21–2.

carry on this debate, Tiberius sees to the elevation of Drusus, in a scene where the senators' criticisms, framed in terms of traditional cultic concerns, ultimately fail to stop Tiberius from effectively naming his successor and perpetuating the Imperial system. The Senate is only allowed to debate the past, while it is the *princeps* who determines the future.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, even when the Senate does turn its attention to traditional matters of cultic memory, it does not seem to engage very effectively with these issues. The results of their discussion on asylum rights lack clarity, and (based on the information Tacitus provides to the reader) their criteria for what earns a city its right of asylum are inconsistently applied and demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of cultic memory. The Senate, the only entity that seems poised to be able to bring Rome back from the brink of religious amnesia, is ultimately incapable of doing so. Much as with the *flamen Dialis*, in the asylum episode, neither Tiberius nor the Senate fully understands what constitutes the best kind of historical precedent and the best way to put such precedents into practice in cultic matters.

3.5 AUGUSTA, *FETIALES*, AND THE SENATE

Amid this flurry of senatorial activity (*Ann.* 3.64.1 *sub idem tempus*, "at about the same time"), Livia falls ill and then recovers, prompting an outpouring of thanksgiving to the gods (3.64.3). The passage has been called a "digression" that rounds off the section on senatorial activity running from 3.57–63,¹⁴⁹ but it nevertheless has much in common with the other religious questions that have recently been explored by Tiberius and the Senate. As in the *flamen Dialis* debate, alteration of the traditional duties of a priesthood is suggested. Tiberius emerges as a defender of religious memory, but it remains clear that there is a strong connection between the Imperial house and the cultic apparatus of Rome.

The Senate celebrates Livia's recovery by decreeing *supplicia* to the gods and *ludi*, in which many of Rome's priestly colleges are to take part:

sed tum supplicia dis ludique magni ab senatu decernuntur, quos pontifices et augures et quindecimviri septemviri simul et sodalibus Augustalibus ederent. censuerat L. Apronius ut fetiales quoque iis ludis praesiderent. contra dixit Caesar, distincto sacerdotiorum iure et repetitis exemplis: neque enim umquam fetialibus hoc maiestatis fuisse. ideo Augustalis adiectos quia proprium eius domus sacerdotium esset pro qua vota persolverentur. (*Ann.* 3.64.3–4)

¹⁴⁸ Kantiréa 2014, 431.

¹⁴⁹ Woodman 1995b, 123.

(But at that time, supplications to the gods and great games were decreed by the Senate, which the *pontifices*, augurs, quindecimvirs, along with the septemvirs and the *Augustales*, were to put on. L. Apronius had expressed the opinion that the *fetiales* too should preside at those games. Caesar spoke against, distinguishing the prerogatives of the different priesthoods and tracing back for examples; nor (he said) had the *fetiales* ever had this sort of majesty. The *Augustales*, he went on, had been added because they were the priesthood particular to the house on behalf of which vows were being fulfilled.)

The Senate's selection of religious functionaries is mostly unproblematic, in that supplications and/or games were a traditional sphere of activity for most of the priests listed. The *pontifices* traditionally participated in a variety of games, rites, and festivals.¹⁵⁰ The *septemviri epulones* prepared sacred banquets (the *epulum Iovis*), but their duties also included games.¹⁵¹ Likewise, the quindecimvirs were mainly responsible for consulting the Sibylline books when mandated by the Senate, but were frequently involved in performing the expiatory rituals, including *ludi*, indicated by their interpretation of the books.¹⁵² But Apronius' proposal to involve the *fetiales* is problematic. Tiberius seems to be in the right in denying the *fetiales* the right to participate: other evidence indicates that their sphere of activity was strictly limited to international law (peace treaties and declarations of war) and they are fundamentally different from the other priests mentioned, since (so far as we know) they had no specific cult or regular rites for which they were responsible.¹⁵³

Apronius' suggestion is similar to Maluginensis' request to govern a province despite being prevented by the rules of his flaminate: each proposal "was a misguided bright idea advanced by a senior consular who ought to have known better and who was accordingly criticised by Tiberius."¹⁵⁴ Yet even if the proposal was misguided, and even if Tiberius is right to refuse the *fetiales* the right to participate, Tiberius also displays inconsistency that casts doubt upon his understanding of the traditional priestly functions he is attempting to police. He gives an explanation for why the *fetiales* should be excluded, but the only priesthood whose inclusion is explained is the *Augustales*. Possibly the spheres of activity of the *pontifices*, quindecimvirs, and septemvirs were so well known to Roman readers that Tacitus did not need to comment on them. The

¹⁵⁰ Cic. *Har. resp.* 12; *ThesCRA* 5.73; van Haepelen 2002, 72–5.

¹⁵¹ Cic. *Har. resp.* 21; *De or.* 3.73; *ThesCRA* 5.83.

¹⁵² *ThesCRA* 5.81; Cf. *Ann.* 11.11.1; §02, pp. 14–15. Quindecimvirs mandated and sometimes performed expiatory *supplicationes* (Boyce 1938, 165; *OCD* s.v. "supplication, Roman"; Siebert 2008).

¹⁵³ The *fetiales* "are, in origin, legal experts whose specific field is upholding peaceful relations between different Latin communities" (Wiedemann 1986, 487). For recent discussions of the *fetiales*' activities, see *ThesCRA* 5.88; Santangelo 2008; Zollschan 2011; Santangelo 2014. Zollschan 2011, 128–9 suggests the possibility that the *fetiales* also participated in games for Jupiter Feretrius (the *Ludi Capitolini*), but there is no evidence for this.

¹⁵⁴ Woodman and Martin 1996, 449.

Augustales, a relatively recent creation, perhaps did need to have their involvement explained, since there was not yet a precedent for their participation in rituals related to the health of living members of the Imperial house (as opposed to *divi*). But Tiberius' inclusion of the augurs does seem to be problematic: they were primarily responsible for interpreting signs¹⁵⁵ and were apparently not involved in games or *supplicationes*, so they seem as inappropriate to the occasion as the *fetiales* would be. If there is a reason why their involvement is allowed when the *fetiales* have to be excluded, Tiberius does not give it. Despite trying to come off as the guardian of appropriate religious procedure who ensures that the *fetiales* should be limited to their traditional ritual functions, Tiberius turns out not really to be as *au fait* with the traditional functions of Roman state priests as he would have his subjects believe.

When we compare Tiberius' reasoning in refusing Apronius' request with the reasons he cited for deciding against Maluginensis' similar one, a further inconsistency appears. Tiberius bases his argument against including the *fetiales* on his own research into a sort of case history for the priesthood, perhaps even indicating that he consulted *commentarii* kept over the centuries by the *fetiales* themselves.¹⁵⁶ This is striking, given that when Tiberius refused Maluginensis' request, he did not use a similar case history for the *flamines Diales*, but based his argument primarily on a declaration by his predecessor Augustus. A request for a modification of cultic memory is refused in the one case because the weight of antiquarian tradition forbids it, in the other because of an Imperial innovation thought to carry more weight than cultic memory. This inconsistency suggests less that Tiberius is dedicated to preserving cultic memory, and more that he merely delights in saying "no" to senators' proposals involving priests and their activities and will use whatever kind of argumentation allows him to make that refusal. Cultic memory (making decisions about religious questions in the present according to how such things have been handled in the past) seems less important to Tiberius than maintaining his position as the ultimate arbiter of *any* sort of question. If we look back at *Ann.* 3.60–3 with this in mind, the senatorial discussion of Asian asylum rights emerges as even more of a sham: a specific, circumscribed area in which Tiberius allowed the Senate to exercise its traditional functions, while in actuality he himself continued to retain the position of ultimate decision-maker. Apronius' proposal and Tiberius' rejection of it can thus be read as a clash between two ways of making religious decisions, the senatorial and the Imperial. Apronius evidently "viewed himself as both qualified and

¹⁵⁵ *ThesCRA* 5.79; Linderski 1986. They performed some other rituals, now poorly understood.

¹⁵⁶ Santangelo 2014, 103; Festus 178.3 L, with Santangelo 2008, 77. See also this chapter, n. 86 and references there cited.

entitled to make suggestions about the role of priests in a proposed religious celebration";¹⁵⁷ Tiberius' refusal shows that such traditional senatorial expertise in religious matters is no longer welcome in Tiberian Rome.

But we should also consider other possible motives for Apronius' proposal. Some have suggested that Apronius was himself a *fetialis* and wanted the honor of being included in the games for Livia's health although it was not strictly appropriate.¹⁵⁸ If this is true, it puts Apronius in a similar category to Maluginensis, the *flamen Dialis*: both seek highly visible positions of honor (proconsular governor, co-presider at public games for Livia) that contravene the traditional rules or functions of the priesthoods they hold. Another possible explanation with similar implications is Apronius' status as a repeat offender against religious memory: he has already gained a reputation for mixing *adulatio* and religious ritual when he proposed supplications, changes to the calendar, and sacrifices to celebrate the death of Libo Drusus (*Ann.* 2.32.2). Even if it is difficult to see how Apronius' proposal about the *fetiales* could be considered *adulatio*¹⁵⁹ (except perhaps in the general sense of thinking that Tiberius will be pleased by the notion that all of Rome's priesthoods, even the *fetiales*, want to be involved in commemorating his mother), the ritual incorrectness of Apronius' request makes it a good candidate for the kind of *dedecus* Tacitus identifies in the senatorial proposals he catalogues:

Exequi sententias haud institui nisi insignis per honestum aut notabili dedecore, quod praecipuum munus annalium reor ne virtutes sileantur utque pravis dictis factisque ex posteritate et infamia metus sit. (*Ann.* 3.65.1)

(It has not been my intent to pursue senatorial proposals, apart from those that are remarkable for their virtue or because of noteworthy disgrace (and I think this is a particular duty of historical writing), so that virtuous conduct should not be passed over in silence, and so that corrupt words and deeds might fear posterity and a bad reputation.)

This statement suggests that Tacitus discusses Apronius' proposal, along with the other senatorial material that has dominated *Annals* 3, so that he can rehearse the most honorable and shameful senatorial *sententiae*. This is done partly to ensure a bad reputation in the future for those who, like Apronius,

¹⁵⁷ Várhelyi 2010, 68.

¹⁵⁸ Woodman 1995b, 120 (following the suggestion of Syme 1986, 293); Várhelyi 2010, 68. There is no independent evidence Apronius held this priesthood, but membership of the college for this period is particularly poorly known, and we know the names of only two of the *fetiales* for AD 22 (Rüpke 2008, 167). See also Woodman and Martin 1996, 448–9. Koestermann 1963, 545, following Furneaux 1896, 469, suggests that Apronius' proposal was motivated by flattery, since Tiberius, like Augustus before him, had held the fetal priesthood, a notion Woodman 1995b, 120 n. 38 rightly rejects (see also Woodman and Martin 1996, 449).

¹⁵⁹ Woodman 1995b, 120; Woodman and Martin 1996, 449; *contra* Luce 1991, 2912; Davies 2004, 190 n. 154, who do see *adulatio* here.

make proposals that are problematic.¹⁶⁰ Although the statement seems to apply to *Annals* 3 at large, Tacitus' placement of it immediately after 3.64 suggests that these musings have a particular relationship to Apronius' proposal and Tiberius' response. The *dedecus* in Apronius' case seems to be ignorance of the traditional rules of Rome's cultic functionaries: one way in which senators can fail to live up to their potential, then, is through ignorance of the city's religious traditions. Note, too, that only Apronius is specifically named, unlike the senators who proposed the *supplicia* and *ludi magni*, or the senators who fail to get anywhere in the discussion of asylum rights (3.63.1) and who are thus not subjected to Tacitus' strategy of naming and shaming. Yet in the Apronius episode, Tacitus has shown us even more than this: in his ignorant inclusion of the augurs, Tiberius reveals himself to be equally ignorant of religious traditions. Although the senators' inability to cope with old-fashioned religious questions is clearly part of the problem in Tiberian Rome, the emperor himself is only slightly better.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

By the time we reach the end of *Annals* 3, Tiberius has been *princeps* for over eight years, and the effects of his principate on the Romans' ability to maintain their religious memory are more apparent than ever. The book has seen major developments in two of the main problems of the principate brought to the reader's attention in *Annals* 1 and 2: a failure to understand, maintain, or uphold the religious traditions of Rome's long and rich past; and the growth of the veneration of deified emperors and their living family members, which entails alterations and additions to cultic memory.

The death of Germanicus means that Tiberian Rome has to perform the important task of deciding how he will be remembered, and no one manages to do this in a fully unproblematic way. Tiberius is a major part of the difficulty: he ultimately fails to give a guiding hand to the commemoration of Germanicus because he continually undermines his own pronouncements. His disingenuous attempts to console the Roman people with the reminder that *principes* are mortal, unsurprisingly, fall flat. He fails to give a definitive ruling on the right way to commemorate Germanicus, or indeed any member of the Imperial family who is not actually a *divus*. By doing too little to curb the alterations to religious memory that are proposed to commemorate Germanicus, and by deploying the rhetoric of vengeance and ritual horror at Piso's trial, Tiberius undermines his own assertion that members of the ruling

¹⁶⁰ On the passage and its notion of negative exemplarity/history as a deterrent, see Luce 1991.

house are no different from other mortals. With these mixed signals coming from the *princeps*, it is perhaps little wonder that Piso's accusers pursue a line of argument that focuses on his religious failings, or that the Senate proposes unprecedented ritual commemorations of Germanicus after Piso's trial. Thus Tiberius ultimately fails to control, or even to offer any clear guidance on, the commemoration of Germanicus. Memory by its very nature is multifaceted, depending on who is doing the commemoration in any given instance, but Tiberius in particular has already shown himself ill-suited to shaping the formation of memory in a way that would minimize problems.

The people are the only ones who mourn Germanicus with anything like appropriateness: according to the proper rituals, and sincerely, without flattery. Yet even this is not quite right: it is a bad political move, Tacitus reminds us, given Tiberius' attitude to Germanicus. The openness of their grief indicates that they do not remember who is in charge (*Ann.* 3.4.1 *meminisse imperitantium*), and how he is likely to view their genuine grief. For Tacitus, then, those who are engaged in the work of performing and shaping memory of people and events gone by must also remember the present; that is, they must be mindful of the political milieu—the principate—in which they live, and behave with requisite caution. Such lack of political savvy only causes further problems, as when the people's acclamation of Agrippina as the sole remaining embodiment of *antiquitas* (*Ann.* 3.4.2) arouses Tiberius' ire against her. Furthermore, the people's apparently overwhelmingly positive opinion of Germanicus is at odds with the Germanicus whom Tacitus has shown us in *Annals* 1 and 2: a melodramatic figure given to using religion primarily for manipulation and fundamentally ignorant of Rome's cultic traditions. The people who love him are remembering him as if none of his bad qualities, amply demonstrated by Tacitus, ever existed. Cursing the gods when such a man dies, or inscribing him into the cultic memory of Rome, is fundamentally problematic and shows a society whose problems with appropriate commemoration are more widespread than just Tiberius himself.

It seems that the nature of Tiberius' reign, beginning as it did with the deification of Augustus, means that the Imperial family is bound to have an outsized place in religious memory, for good or for ill. Even when the Senate is meant to be handling traditional religious matters, such as the *flamen Dialis*' "taboos" or Greek sanctuaries' asylum rights, members of the Imperial family overshadow those discussions. The material about Drusus and Livia that is interwoven with these two episodes sets discussions about ritual strongly in the context of the principate, in which honors for the living members of the Imperial family must occupy the Senate as much as venerable traditions of worship. Furthermore, the nature of the discussions about the *flamen Dialis* and temple asylum leaves the reader in doubt as to whether Rome (particularly its traditional senatorial apparatus) is actually capable of resolving its ritual questions anymore. The discussion about the *flamen Dialis* is marked by

insincerity and *adulatio*; the one on temple asylum seems to offer a salutary counterexample of old-fashioned senatorial *libertas*. Yet both debates leave the reader with doubts.

It is not only the content of these discussions, but also the way they are conducted, that reveal fundamental problems in Tiberian Rome's relationship with cultic memory. When people look into the past for precedents that will justify cultic innovation, they see what they wish to see to achieve their present designs. Maluginensis, holder of one of Rome's most venerable priesthoods, is so misguided as to assert that it would be unproblematic to violate its traditional *caerimoniae*, based on the evidently fallacious argument that nothing bad happened to Rome during the years when the post of *flamen Dialis* was left entirely vacant (and the city was gripped by civil war). When the Senate investigates the claim of Greek states to asylum rights, they are performing an act that is deeply tied to the past in two senses: the investigation requires looking into the past to determine which cities have the best claim, and this sort of investigation is old-fashioned in itself. Yet in this most memory-oriented of meetings, the Senate fails in its purpose: the episode is hollow and inconclusive. The traditional relationship between religion, memory, and state is beginning to break down.

Even worse, these debates reveal that people do not value the past as the best determiner for religious decisions in the present. When Tiberius is locked in conflict with Maluginensis, from the emperor's point of view, it is pointless to look into the priesthood's deep and complex past to find a reason to refuse his request; all that is required is to repeat Augustus' assertion that the *flamen's* departure from Rome was not permissible. During the discussion on temple asylum, the senate and consuls similarly dismiss antiquity as the best proof of a sanctuary's right to grant asylum; according to the principles of cultic memory, the ancientness of a temple's origins should be the *best* reason to continue its grant, not a reason to deny it. This devaluation of the past is all-pervasive and a fundamental threat to Rome's cultural memory. Through the events of *Annals* 3, then, Tacitus makes clear the scope of the problem. It is not merely any one individual (Tiberius or Germanicus) who is incapable of upholding Rome's religious traditions. Tacitus shows us a paradigm shift in Roman cultural values that grips all ranks of society: it is becoming clear that the traditional view, that religious traditions of the past must be preserved for their very antiquity, is being abandoned.

Divine Wrath and *Annals* 4

4.1 INTRODUCTION

If *Annals* 3 sees an intensification of the problems that have characterized Tacitus' religious narrative of Tiberius' principate, the last three books of the Tiberian hexad demonstrate a downward slide. As book 4 begins, Tacitus clarifies the consequences of the paradigm shift happening in Roman society that he has demonstrated in the previous book with incidents such as the *flamen Dialis* episode and the temple asylum discussion; those same subjects will now be revisited in a slightly different context. For with the start of *Annals* 4, Tacitus also makes explicit for the first time in the work that the gods are angry at Rome. This relatively sudden development, a surprising twist in the narrative, invites the reader to re-evaluate the religious material that has been presented in the previous three books: suddenly the threats to traditional Roman cultic memory and the rise of the veneration of emperors and their family members can be retroactively viewed as threats to the *pax deorum* that compromise Rome's relationship with the gods. This new narrative frame is closely connected with the rise of Sejanus, whose savagery, and the savagery he brings out in others, lead to new perversions of ritual that threaten Rome's cultic memory. This doom-laden atmosphere persists through the end of the hexad. Tiberius must also navigate the increasingly slippery slope of cultic honors, as proposals for temples to himself force him to address the question of how (or whether) he will be commemorated in cult during his lifetime, and also how he will be remembered after his death. Tacitus weaves together these threads into a complex fabric that shows increasingly clearly how these factors—emperor cult, worshipful treatment of Tiberius, a growing incompetence when it comes to Rome's religious traditions, and the violence of Roman society under Sejanus—are strongly related to each other and to the anger of the gods.

4.2 FORTUNA, DIVINE WRATH, AND THE RISE OF SEJANUS

While the reader may certainly have developed the impression that Tiberian Rome is heading down a path that might lead to divine anger, Tacitus has not expressed that idea explicitly. Apart from the Tiber flood toward the beginning of Tiberius' reign (*Ann.* 1.76), which traditionally could be seen as a prodigy indicating the anger of the gods,¹ very little has suggested that there might be consequences to the changing dynamics of cult in Tiberian Rome. This all changes with the opening of *Annals* 4. The effect this produces on the reader is key to understanding the impact of religious material in Tacitus' work so far and frames the way it will be presented in the remainder of the Tiberian hexad.

At the beginning of his account of AD 23, Tacitus tells us that "suddenly fortune began to create a disturbance, and he himself began to be savage, or to lend strength to savage men. The start and cause of this was in the hands of Aelius Sejanus, prefect of the praetorian cohorts, whose power I have mentioned previously" (*Ann.* 4.1.1 *repente turbare fortuna coepit, saevire ipse aut saevientibus viris praebere. initium et causa penes Aelium Seianum cohortibus praetoriis praefectum cuius de potentia supra memoravi*). The suddenness of the change in the course of things is explicitly stated (*repente*), and the nature of that change is, unexpectedly, described as if it were the doing of a personified supernatural force, *fortuna*. The year is marked as a turning point in Tiberius' reign, a notion reinforced by a clear allusion to Sallust, who uses very similar language describing *fortuna's* activities to mark a turning point as Rome began its moral decline after defeating Carthage in 146 BC: "Fortune began to be savage and to mix everything up" (*Sall. Cat.* 10.1 *saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit*).

It is not straightforward to unpack the significance of Tacitus' reference to *fortuna* here, partly because scholars do not agree on the meaning of *fortuna's* intervention in the Sallust passage to which Tacitus alludes. While some have interpreted Sallust's *fortuna* as an irrational and malevolent supernatural force whose capricious intervention upsets Rome's forward march of Imperial expansion, this is hard to reconcile with Sallust's sustained argument (*Cat.* 6–13) that the conspiracy of Catiline in 63 BC is directly related to Rome's growth during the wars of expansion prior to 146 BC and a resulting moral decline; in other words, that the events that come after this turning point in history have a clearly identifiable moral, not supernatural, cause.² Some therefore believe that the disastrous shift ascribed to *fortuna* is a metaphor for describing a psychological change in the Roman people, or the

¹ See Krauss 1930, 61–3; Shannon 2018; and §1.1, p. 26.

² See Levene 2000, 179, who also summarizes previous interpretations of the passage.

moral decline that Sallust is cataloging, rather than an actual assertion that a supernatural force intervened to vent its savage anger on Rome.³ Similarly, Tacitus' reference to *fortuna*, although surprising, is not necessarily a *deus ex machina* that alters the course of Tiberius' principate in ways that have not been anticipated in the previous narrative.⁴ Indeed, Tacitus explicitly relates the change to Sejanus, who (he reminds us) has already made an appearance in his narrative.⁵ If, for Sallust, *fortuna* might simply mean "the turn of events resulting from a change in Rome's morals,"⁶ for Tacitus, it might simply mean "the turn of events resulting from Sejanus' rise to prominence."⁷

Yet Tacitus' description of fortune's effects differs fundamentally from Sallust's, which suggests that Sejanus' rise is in a very real way the manifestation of a supernatural intervention in human affairs. After briefly summarizing Sejanus' earlier career, Tacitus describes the hold he came to have over Tiberius by becoming a close confidant in front of whom the emperor could be uniquely unguarded: "He did this not so much because of his own shrewdness (for he was defeated through these very same skills) as because of the wrath of the gods against the Roman enterprise, for which Sejanus' thriving and his fall were equally disastrous" (*Ann.* 4.1.2 *non tam sollertia (quippe isdem artibus victus est) quam deum ira in rem Romanam, cuius pari exitio vixit ceciditque*). If *turbare fortuna coepit* in the previous passage was merely a dramatic way to refer to the rise of Sejanus, the true cause of this turn for the worse, Tacitus now makes clear that there is a second cause behind that one: it was actually the gods' anger at Rome that saw to it that Sejanus insinuated himself into Tiberius' confidences in the first place.⁸ This compels us to take seriously the potential supernatural overtones of *fortuna* in *Ann.* 4.1.1. Tacitus' choice of wording is not simply literary shorthand for a marked and sudden shift, as Sallust's decision to mention *fortuna* may have been, but a real assertion of supernatural involvement. In this instance, *fortuna* is not the positive, providential force it can sometimes be, but a power that brings evils to Rome.⁹

Some commentators have dismissed this reference to *deum ira* as a stylistic device.¹⁰ When read in the context of the picture of religion in Tiberian Rome that Tacitus has presented thus far, however, there is a strong case for taking it seriously. The historiographical tradition might have led readers to expect a

³ Latta 1988, 275–7; Heldmann 1993, 109–10; Levene 2000, 179 nn. 41–2; Matthews 2011, 147–9.

⁴ Cf. Heinrichs 1976, 6; 19–20. For *fortuna* as *deus ex machina* in Sallust, see McGushin 1977, 88–9.

⁵ Most recently at *Ann.* 3.66.3; for other passages in *Ann.* 1–3 where he appears, see Martin and Woodman 1989, 80.

⁶ Levene 2000, 179 n. 42.

⁷ Cf. Heinrichs 1976, 13.

⁸ Cf. Heinrichs 1976, 180–3.

⁹ Cf. similar language on *fortuna*'s causative role in Vespasian's rise to power at *Hist.* 2.1.1.

¹⁰ Walker 1952, 248; Syme 1958, 521; Koestermann 1965, 35; Martin and Woodman 1989, 84.

narrative pattern of the sort that is very clear in the works of Livy: religious transgression or neglect, to which the gods respond with prodigies signifying their anger at human misconduct, to which humans respond in turn by taking action to expiate that anger.¹¹ The prodigy-expiation complex has been strikingly absent from the *Annals* so far (apart from the Tiber flood of AD 15, *Ann.* 1.76, which Tiberius refuses to see as a prodigy), but there has been plenty of evidence of human misconduct: a decline in cultic memory in the form of ritual alterations such as the unconventional expansion of the augurs' duties (3.64.3) and Maluginensis' misguided proposal about the *flamen Dialis* (3.57); poor religious interpretations made by Tiberius and other members of the Imperial house (particularly Germanicus); Tiberius' unwillingness to consult the Sibylline books (1.76); and additions to Rome's cultic apparatus, especially the deification of Augustus and the corresponding shift toward worshipful modes of interaction with the living *princeps* and his relatives.¹²

All these would seem to give the gods ample grounds for anger. In other words, if (as the foregoing analysis of *Annals* 1–3 suggests) human neglect and innovation have given the gods reason to be angry, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Tacitus is not simply using a stylistic device when he ascribes this beginning of Rome's downward spiral to divine wrath. That is, Tacitus is not simply borrowing the vocabulary of the transgression-prodigy-expiation pattern to evoke his predecessors' mode of historiography, but he is actually making use of the intellectual underpinnings of that pattern itself to construct a framework of causation for the events he reports. The problematic actions of Tiberius and his subjects in *Annals* 1–3 are followed by the manifestation of divine anger in the form of Sejanus. For whatever reason, the gods have not (yet) seen fit to warn Tiberian Rome of its misconduct through striking signs of their displeasure like swarms of bees or thunderbolts. But the mere fact that this is the first manifestation of that divine anger does not make that anger any less real.

One possible explanation for this oddity is that the gods simply do not care enough about mortals to make the effort of warning them that they are angry. According to the argument put forward by Cicero in *De Divinatione*, the functioning of the entire system of divination is predicated upon the notion that the gods exist and that their loving concern for mankind motivates them to send warnings to humans in the form of signs (Cic. *Div.* 1.82–3).¹³ The same could be said for prodigies. Yet Tacitus himself in the *Histories* declared that the prodigious occurrences during the Year of the Four Emperors proved that “the gods do not care about our security, only vengeance” (*Hist.* 1.3.2 *non esse curae deis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem*).¹⁴ A similar rationale could

¹¹ See §0.2, p. 12; Levene 1993.

¹² So Davies 2004, 205.

¹³ See Wardle 2006, 309 for further examples of the notion of divine beneficence in ancient thought.

¹⁴ On the passage, see further §0.2, pp. 16–17, and Shannon 2014, 273–5.

apply in the *Annals*: the gods do not care whether mortals have the tools they need to maintain a state of *securitas*: therefore they do not send prodigies to warn them that their *securitas* is under threat and give them the opportunity to correct their mistakes before a less recognizable manifestation of divine wrath—Sejanus—falls upon them.

But it is also true that Tiberius has willfully disavowed the one event thus far in the *Annals* that looks like a prodigy: the Tiber flood (*Ann.* 1.76), which probably *would* have been interpreted as a sign from the gods if Tiberius had followed traditional practice. If Tacitus wishes us to read the flood as a true prodigy which Tiberius stubbornly refused to recognize, heed, or address actively through the traditional mechanism of consulting the Sibylline books, then it is perhaps no wonder that the gods do not send further signs of their anger until Sejanus: Tiberius had a chance to take divine warnings seriously, but squandered it. Whichever explanation we prefer (lack of divine concern, Imperial obstructionism, or some combination of the two), the fact that Tacitus has not explicitly referred to *deum ira* previously in his narrative in no way diminishes its impact here. There has been clear wrongdoing by humans in terms of the decay in cultic memory that has happened thus far in the *Annals*. Tacitus also makes it clear that after this point things are only going to get worse, for Sejanus' rise is just the beginning of *fortuna*'s savagery and the gods' wrath (4.1.1 *coepit*).

The tendency to treat Tiberius and other Imperial figures in godlike ways is another pattern that continues to be very much in evidence early in *Annals* 4. In the passage of Sallust to which Tacitus alludes, it is *fortuna* itself which inflicts savagery on mankind (*Cat.* 10.1 *saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit*). Tacitus, however, makes Tiberius the subject of *saevire*, transferring to the emperor the savagery that Sallust had attributed to *fortuna* itself (*Ann.* 4.1.1 *cum repente turbare fortuna coepit, saevire ipse*). As Martin and Woodman note, "The emperor is about to take on the characteristics of a perverse and powerful deity."¹⁵ The savagery usually associated with *fortuna* has been transferred to Tiberius himself, similar to the growing trend among Tiberius' subjects of treating him as a superior being akin to the gods. It is typically his association with *divus Augustus* which puts Tiberius on this exalted plane in his subjects' eyes; by also associating Tiberius with *fortuna* at its worst, Tacitus implies there is a darker side to elevated position.

Now, furthermore, it is not just Tiberius who receives worshipful treatment from his subjects, but Sejanus as well. Tiberius is described as being "favorable, and so well-disposed" to Sejanus "that he...allowed his images to be worshipped in the theaters and fora, and within the headquarters of the legions" (*Ann.* 4.2.3 *facili Tiberio atque ita prono ut...colique per theatra et fora effigies*

¹⁵ Martin and Woodman 1989, 79; cf. Pelling 2013, 7.

eius interque principia legionum sineret). The Senate, reacting to Tiberius' praise of Sejanus, had already voted to place his statue in Pompey's theater (3.72.3), but now the statues have multiplied and become objects of veneration. Sejanus' image is now found not only throughout the city, but also in the legions' *principia*, sacred places where standards were kept as sacred objects.¹⁶ This is particularly worrying given soldiers' susceptibility to superstition and credulity (cf. *Ann.* 1.28.2) and their propensity to be taken in by problematic religious ideas; a group of people who could not see the problems with Germanicus' rhetoric of purification by human sacrifice may not be capable of making a distinction between the sacred standards and the statue of a living man. Tacitus' language even makes it seem as though the enthusiasm for Sejanus is escaping from Tiberius' control. *Sineret* highlights Tiberius' culpable lack of interference to stop such treatment of Sejanus. Furthermore, as Martin and Woodman have pointed out, the adjectives *facilis* and *pronus* with which Tacitus describes Tiberius "are both used technically of favourable deities, but the latter is also used of humble suppliants... and thus suggests that the godlike emperor... is the inferior of his minister."¹⁷ Tiberius, so careful to draw the line between the Imperial family and the gods, is less vigilant about the boundaries between divine and mortal where Sejanus is concerned.

Tacitus also makes clear that the toxic dynamic of prayers to the emperor that characterized Tiberius' accession is still alive and well, combined with *adulatio* on the part of the Senate. When Drusus dies (a victim of Sejanus' poison), Tiberius brings Germanicus' children, who had been under Drusus' care, before the Senate and pleads with the senators to look after them: "Now that Drusus has been snatched away, I turn my prayers to you, and call upon you before the gods and the fatherland: take up these great-grandchildren of Augustus, descended from exceedingly famous ancestors" (*Ann.* 4.8.5 *erepto Druso preces ad vos converto disque et patria coram obtestor: Augusti pronepotes, clarissimis maioribus genitos, suscipite*). Similar language was used to describe the senators' supplication of the new emperor Tiberius (*Ann.* 1.11.1 *versae inde ad Tiberium preces*),¹⁸ but now the dynamic is reversed, for here it is the emperor who makes a great show of praying to the Senate. They respond, as if on cue, with prayers directed back to him:

Magno ea fletu et mox precationibus faustis audita; ac si modum orationi posuisset, misericordia sui gloriaque animos audientium impleverat: ad vana et totiens inrisa revolutus, de reddenda re publica utque consules seu quis alius regimen susciperent, vero quoque et honesto fidem dempsit. memoriae Drusi eadem quae in Germanicum decernuntur, plerisque additis, ut ferme amat posterior adulatio. (4.9.1–2)

¹⁶ Shotter 1989, 128. See also Ch. 2 n. 13 and references there cited.

¹⁷ Martin and Woodman 1989, 90.

¹⁸ Martin and Woodman 1989, 121.

(These words were received with great weeping and in due course with prayers of good omen; and if Tiberius had imposed moderation on his speech, he would have filled his hearers' minds with pity for himself, and with glory; but by returning to subject matter that was empty and had been so often mocked (handing over the state, and that the consuls or someone else should take control), he deprived of credibility even the part of his speech that was true and honest. The same things were decreed for Drusus' memory as for Germanicus, with many additions, as flattery after the fact generally loves to do.)

The honors proposed for Drusus' memory are equated with those offered to Germanicus (2.83). Whereas in Germanicus' case, Tacitus only implied that their excessiveness was driven by a competition among senators to show their devotion to the deceased, here he actually refers to the proposals for Drusus as *adulatio*. Apparently people still suffer from the impulse to alter Rome's cultic memory in order to flatter the Imperial family. There may also be a tone of flattery in the prayers to Tiberius. They, along with Tiberius' claim that he wants to give up command, show a dynamic similar to what we saw in *Ann.* 1.11. But now the whole dance of flattery feels even more forced: no one believes Tiberius when he makes noises about abdicating Imperial power, and the Senate evidently are not being sincere either. The ways in which Imperial family members will be commemorated are tainted by the same noxious *adulatio* that leads people to "pray" to Tiberius.

If *Annals* 4 chronicles a new beginning of supernatural savagery and divine anger, it is also the beginning of an unpleasant change in Tiberius' principate, as Tacitus tells us explicitly: "For that year brought to Tiberius the beginning of a principate changed for the worse" (4.6.1 *quoniam Tiberio mutati in deterius principatus initium ille annus attulit*). This makes the opening of *Annals* 4 a new beginning, the start of the second half of the Tiberian hexad.¹⁹ By revisiting the same motifs of *preces* and *recusatio* that attended Tiberius' accession (1.11), Tacitus reminds us of the tendency toward veneration that characterizes the principate. Reinforcing the dynamic of worshipful treatment of Tiberius is particularly important at this point in the narrative. It shows that the pattern of worshipful conduct toward the living emperor and extreme measures to commemorate deceased members of the Imperial house, among the possible causes of the *deum ira* manifested at the start of *Annals* 4, have by no means abated. If anything, it has increased in intensity, carried aloft on a tide of *adulatio* that has swollen ever larger over the course of *Annals* 1–3. Tiberian Rome, in other words, does not seem liable to change its ways any time soon. Indeed, the opening chapters of *Annals* 4 provide the background for a book where the worship of Tiberius himself will be ever more at issue.

¹⁹ Martin and Woodman 1989, 14, 77.

4.3 AMNESIA AND MEMORY: TEMPLES AND PRIESTHOODS

As *Annals* 4 progresses, Tacitus reinforces the motif of Rome's twin religious problems by revisiting two of his showpieces for cultic memory from *Annals* 3: asylum rights in Eastern temples (*Ann.* 4.14.1–2), and the ritual taboos surrounding the *flamen Dialis* (4.16). Sandwiched between these two reports is the proposal to erect a temple dedicated to Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate in Asia (4.15.3), the first temple in the *Annals* that would explicitly be dedicated to the worship of the living emperor. If the divine anger manifested in *Ann.* 4.1.2 is the result of mortals' disregard for the rules and rituals that have governed their religious lives for centuries, and of the growing tendency to treat the emperor as a god, Tacitus is making an important point by revisiting this material here: he implies that the same problems that have plagued Rome since the beginning of the *Annals* are continuing unabated and are actually getting worse.

The second discussion of temple asylum allows Tacitus to revisit the issue of senatorial incompetence raised in *Annals* 3.

Is quoque annus legationes Graecarum civitatum habuit, Samiis Iunonis, Cois Aesculapii delubro vetustum asyli ius ut firmaretur petentibus. Samii decreto Amphictyonum nitebantur, quis praecipuum fuit rerum omnium iudicium, qua tempestate Graeci conditis per Asiam urbibus ora maris potiebantur. neque dispar apud Coos antiquitas, et accedebat meritum ex loco: nam civis Romanos templo Aesculapii induxerant, cum iussu regis Mithridatis apud cunctas Asiae insulas et urbes trucidarentur. (*Ann.* 4.14.1–2)

(That year also had embassies from Greek communities: the Samians sought to have the ancient right of asylum confirmed for their shrine of Juno, and the Coans for theirs of Aesculapius. The Samians relied upon a decree of the Amphictyones, who had highest jurisdiction in all matters when the Greeks, after founding cities throughout Asia, controlled the shores of the [Aegean] Sea. Nor was there unequal ancientness among the Coans, and they had additional merit from their location: for they had led Roman citizens into the temple of Aesculapius when they were being slaughtered in all islands and cities of Asia on the order of Mithridates.)

Tacitus does not say why the representatives of Samos and Cos did not come with those of the other states in the previous year: perhaps they merely arrived late,²⁰ or perhaps they deliberately waited, biding their time to assess how Tiberius would respond to the earlier delegations and formulating their argumentative strategies accordingly. If so, that inconclusive debate gave them little to go on, since it was not always clear why some states' evidence

²⁰ So Koestermann 1965, 75.

failed to move the Senate, or why other communities were more successful.²¹ Samos' strategy of reliance on an amphictyonic decree is ill-judged, since the Greek states who made successful asylum petitions in the first round sidelined such Panhellenic precedents; a better guarantee of success would have been to prove that the city's *ius asyli* had been approved by a Roman authority.²² Cos's argument seems rather better, combining a major demonstration of loyalty to Rome with a historical grant of asylum.²³ Tacitus gives us no indication of the outcome of these petitions, nor does he throw any positive light on the activity of the Senate, as he did in *Annals* 3 by highlighting its *libertas*. Tacitus does note in the next chapter, discussing the Senate's role in decreeing a public funeral and other honors upon the death of a long-time friend of Tiberius, that all of this was done by a decree of the Senate, "among whom even then everything was being discussed" (4.15.2 *apud quos etiam tum cuncta tractabantur*). It is significant that Tacitus does not highlight senatorial activity when questions of traditional cultic memory come up for discussion, but only for the creation of a new memory via honors granted to those close to Tiberius. The role of the Senate in policing cultic memory is minimized, making the body appear ineffective, even more so than in the similar discussion in *Annals* 3. Compare also the incident reported immediately after the embassies from Cos and Samos: the praetors' failure to curb the bad behavior of actors forces Tiberius to intervene and originate a proposal that would eventually see actors banned from Italy (4.14.3). Magistrates, too, are ineffectual and no longer capable of performing their traditional duties, meaning the emperor has to step in. Asylum discussions have now become an apparently random antiquarian detail with little grounding in the progress of the narrative, rather than a showpiece of senatorial *libertas*; things are even worse than they were in *Annals* 3.

Juxtaposed with these ancient temples is the proposal of a new one, associated with another request from Asia arising out of the successful prosecution of procurator Lucilius Capito and proconsul C. Silanus, condemned in the previous year (*Ann.* 3.66–9):

ita reus cognito negotio damnatur. ob quam ultionem et quia priore anno in C. Silanum vindicatum erat, decrevere Asiae urbes templum Tiberio matrique eius ac senatui. et permissum statuere; egitque Nero grates ea causa patribus atque avo, laetas inter audientium adfectiones qui recenti memoria Germanici illum aspici, illum audiri rebantur. (4.15.2–3)

²¹ See §3.4, p. 158.

²² Cf. Rigsby 1996, 387, 394.

²³ On the Coans' activities in the war with Mithridates, see Sherwin-White 1978, 138–9. The temple of Aesculapius at Cos reappears at *Ann.* 12.61.2 (see §6.5, pp. 272–4). In contrast, Ephesus and Pergamon, both granted asylum rights in AD 22, slaughtered Romans in their temple on the occasion of Mithridates' decree (*App. Mith.* 4.23).

(And so after the business had been investigated, the defendant [Lucilius Capito] was condemned. Because of this vengeance, and because in the previous year punishment had been inflicted on C. Silanus, the cities of Asia decreed a temple to Tiberius, his mother, and the Senate. And permission to build was given. And for this reason Nero gave thanks to the fathers and to his grandfather, to the delighted reactions of his listeners, who, with the memory of Germanicus still fresh, thought it was him they were seeing, him they were hearing.)

Ultio usually relates to vengeance for military defeat or murder,²⁴ so “vengeance” taken on a Roman citizen for poor conduct in government may make us feel uneasy. In particular, Tiberius’ involvement in both men’s trials is problematic. The speed with which Tacitus shifts from relating Tiberius’ criticisms of Lucilius’ actions to a matter-of-fact statement that the Senate condemned him, implies a causal relationship between the two, reinforced by *ita*. The only arguments from the trial that we hear are Tiberius’; it is as though all other evidence is irrelevant once the emperor has spoken, and the Senate’s condemnation is in line with the emperor’s wishes. Tacitus described the same phenomenon even more blatantly, and negatively, in recounting Silanus’ trial. Although Tacitus leaves no doubt that Silanus actually did commit gubernatorial misconduct, the mounting pressure brought to bear by the high status of Silanus’ many accusers and the emperor’s personal participation in the interrogation process prevented the trial from being completely fair: “Nor was it possible for Silanus to refuse or escape, and often he even had to make a confession, lest Tiberius should have interrogated in vain” (*Ann.* 3.67.1–2 *neque refellere aut eludere dabatur, ac saepe etiam confitendum erat ne frustra quaesivisset*). The very fact that it is the emperor doing the questioning requires a confession of guilt, even if it is a false one. So the temple to Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate arises out of the condemnation of both of these miscreant governors (secured with the help of pressure brought to bear by Tiberius). Wrapped up in this cultic commemoration, therefore, is another, extremely problematic, memory of the inherent unfairness of the Roman justice system to which the principate has given rise. Cultic commemoration involving *ultio*, something Tiberius previously prohibited when he blocked statues and altars from being dedicated to Mars Ultor following Piso’s condemnation (3.18.2), is now apparently allowed. In a post-*Annals*-4.1 world, the emperor no longer protests savage vengeance, setting a worrying precedent for future *ultio*-related dedications.²⁵ The case of Silanus raises a further problem, in that he was accused also of “violating Augustus’ divinity” (3.66.1 *violatum Augusti numen*). Importantly, Tiberius does not dismiss the charge, as he did for Rubrius (1.73 *violatum...numen Augusti*) and Appuleia Varilla (2.50).²⁶ Apparently Tiberius now allows this to be a punishable crime. The link

²⁴ e.g. *Ann.* 2.13.1, 2.26.4, 2.75.1.

²⁵ See §7.7, pp. 328–9, on Nero’s dedication to Jupiter Vindex (15.74.1–2).

²⁶ See §1.3, pp. 40–3 and pp. 44–5.

between emperor cult and the subversion of the judicial process at Rome has been building, to the point where a new temple to Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate enshrines in cultic memory a celebration of two convictions secured largely with the help of the emperor's disfavor.

The proposal also affects the broader nature of political discourse at Rome beyond emperor–Senate relations. As Nero expresses his gratitude to the Senate for permitting the Asians to build the temple, the senators remember Germanicus, leading to an affection for Nero which is all the stronger for Sejanus' hatred of him (4.15.3). This ominously recalls onlookers' observations about Germanicus' triumph (2.41.1) and hints at the tragedy to which this political discourse, coupled with the hostility of *fortuna's* agent Sejanus, may lead.²⁷ The issue of cultic commemoration of the living emperor is raised again, this time in a context that casts a great deal of doubt upon its motives and potential effects.

Immediately afterwards, we are reminded of the principate's deleterious effects on Rome's cultic traditions as the Senate revisits another issue from *Annals* 3: proposals to change the restrictive ritual taboos surrounding the *flamen Dialis* (cf. *Ann.* 3.71.2).

Sub idem tempus de flamine Diali in locum Servi Maluginensis defuncti legendo, simul roganda nova lege disseruit Caesar. nam patricos confarreatis parentibus genitos tres simul nominari, ex quis unus legeretur, vetusto more; neque adesse, ut olim, eam copiam, omissa confarreandi adsuetudine aut inter paucos retenta (pluresque eius rei causas adferebat, potissimam penes incuriam virorum feminarumque); accedere ipsius caerimoniae difficultates quae consulto vitarentur et quoniam exiret e iure patrio qui id flamonium apisceretur quaeque in manum flaminis conveniret. ita medendum senatus decreto aut lege, sicut Augustus quaedam ex horrida illa antiquitate ad praesentem usum flexisset. igitur tractatis religionibus placitum instituto flaminum nihil demutari: sed lata lex qua flaminica Dialis sacrorum causa in potestate viri, cetera promisco feminarum iure ageret. et filius Maluginensis patri suffectus. (4.16.1–3)

(Around the same time Caesar spoke about electing a *flamen Dialis* in the place of Servius Maluginensis, who had died, and at the same time about approving a new law. For three patricians born to parents married by *confarreatio* were simultaneously nominated, of whom one was to be elected, according to ancient custom. But there was not (he said) the same availability as before, since the custom of practicing *confarreatio* had fallen out of use or been retained only among a few people (and he adduced several causes for this state of affairs, the strongest of which was the indifference of husbands and wives); in addition, there were the difficulties of the ritual itself, which were deliberately being avoided;²⁸ and also

²⁷ See §1.6, pp. 63–5 on the passage, esp. on *infaustus*. Martin and Woodman 1989, 140 note the visual element of this passage; cf. 2.41.1 *intuentium visus*.

²⁸ I follow the interpretation of Martin and Woodman 1989, 141–2, who take *caerimoniae* to refer to the ritual duties of the *flamen* (rather than to *confarreatio*). The interpretation is strengthened by use of the term *caerimoniae* in this sense at *Ann.* 3.58–9 and 4.16.4.

the fact that a man who attained the flamine, and a woman who came under the *flamen's* legal power, would both pass out of their father's legal jurisdiction. And so (Tiberius said) a remedy had to be devised by a senatorial decree or a law, in the same way that Augustus had bent certain aspects of that grim antiquity in the interest of advantage in the present. Therefore, religious scruple having been dealt with, it was decided that there would be no change to the *flamines'* custom; but a law was passed according to which the *flaminica* would go into the legal power of her husband as far as the rites of the *Dialis* were concerned, but in all other respects would enjoy the usual rights of wives. And Maluginensis' son was elected in place of his father.)

The type of marriage they enter into has cultic consequences for the *flamen* and *flaminica* and the rites they must perform. Unlike other varieties of Roman marriage ceremony, *confarreatio* involved the gods: because the ritual included the sacrifice of a cake to Jupiter Farreus and required the presence of *flamen Dialis* and *pontifex maximus* as witnesses, *confarreatio* was termed "a type of sacrifice" (Gaius *Inst.* 1.112 *genus sacrificii*).²⁹ Being married by *confarreatio* typically meant that a woman "became part of [her husband's] family for religious and legal purposes."³⁰ Legally this meant entering her husband's *manus*, which would ensure that she (and any property she brought to the marriage) would be under her husband's control. This prospect was apparently unattractive to many families, who favored forms of marriage without *manus*, leaving the woman and her property under the control of her natal family and her *paterfamilias*.³¹ But a wife married by *confarreatio* was said "to have a share not only in her husband's property, but also in his sacred rites" (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.25.2 γυναῖκα . . . κοινωνὸν πάντων εἶναι χρημάτων τε καὶ ἱερῶν). The cultic aspect of entering her husband's *manus* was particularly important for the *flaminica*, whose prominent ritual function was probably tied to her marital status.³² In a cultic sense, then, allowing a man whose parents had not been married with this specific ritual to become *flamen Dialis*, and allowing the *flamen's* wife to bypass the ceremony's important cultic component, could be seen to have a negative impact on the ritual suitability of these two figures to perform the necessary rituals for Jupiter. Some of Tiberius' words (*vetusto more; neque adesse, ut olim, eam copiam*) seem to express a nostalgia for the past, when *confarreatio* was more common and Rome did not face the same shortage of candidates.

On the other hand, rebuilding the sharply dwindling supply of potential *flamines* is also a valid concern from the point of view of preserving continuity in Roman cultic memory: since so few sons of *confarreate* marriages exist who would satisfy the traditional requirement, it is possible to envision a dark future where an unwavering insistence on *confarreatio* might mean that there

²⁹ See also Pliny *HN* 18.10; Treggiari 1991, 22–4; Schieman 2003.

³⁰ Treggiari 1991, 29.

³¹ Treggiari 1991, 32–3.

³² Boels 1973, 78–80, 89–91.

were no suitable candidates, and that the position of *flamen Dialis* could no longer be filled, with potentially disastrous consequences for the continuity of Jupiter's rites and the well-being of the Roman state. The issue is one of continuity versus change. It is not clear that strictly upholding standards of ritual purity handed down through ancestral custom (a valuable and necessary aspect of Roman cultic memory) is in this case preferable to relaxing those requirements to ensure the priesthood's survival. The Senate's solution appears to take an appropriate middle way: the ritual aspect of *farreatio* will remain in force, such that the *flaminica* will be able to perform her ritual duties without legally having to enter into the *manus* of her husband.³³ Cultic memory, it seems, is preserved.

Tiberius may advocate change, but does so in the service of a kind of conservatism. Compare this with Tiberius' attitude the last time the *flamen Dialis* came up for discussion. The previous year provided an example of the *difficultates* of the *flamen*'s restrictive *caerimoniae*, but Tiberius (speaking for the pontifical college) ruled to preserve them (*Ann.* 3.71.2–3). What both cases have in common is their appeal to Augustan precedent. On the previous occasion, Tiberius invoked Augustus' policies as the only precedent necessary for denying the *flamen Dialis* the right to govern a province (*Ann.* 3.71.2), far more important than the long centuries of traditional practice, to which Tiberius refers only secondarily and obliquely. Here, however, Tiberius praises Augustus' wisdom in turning away from *horrida antiquitas* to modernize certain aspects of religious practice in the interest of keeping them from vanishing altogether. In both cases, Augustan precedent is valorized regardless of whether Augustus *himself* was actually strictly adhering to cultic memory in its narrowest sense (i.e. preservation of ancient liturgies, religious rules, etc. with absolutely no changes). In Tiberius' eyes, the interpretation of cultic memory as crystallized by Augustus is all that is necessary, regardless of how traditional that interpretation was; although Tiberius does sometimes go back further into history in his search for precedents, it is Augustus' precedent that is most important. This underlines, yet again, Augustus' out-sized influence on the interpretation of cultic matters.

But it also provides another example of a cultural trend Tacitus first showed operating in the Senate's judgment on the Asian cities' claims to asylum rights in *Annals* 3: the importance of ancientness. The *vetustas* of the Asian communities' religious traditions, which, according to the basic principle of Roman cultic memory, should be the best guarantor of a cult's venerability, makes their claims suspicious instead of bolstering them.³⁴ Something similar is evident in Tiberius' words here: instead of being a positive quality, *antiquitas* is in this case decidedly negative. The noun *antiquitas* is linked with the adjective

³³ Treggiari 1991, 23.

³⁴ See §3.4, pp. 157–8.

horridus elsewhere in Latin literature, but always in the context of aesthetics, such as when describing the cruder style of works of art from the past, or the oratorical style characteristic of speakers from the Republic.³⁵ Yet in none of these examples is *antiquitas* itself described as *horrida* (the noun–adjective combination is unique to the *Annals*), only things or people. Nor does Tiberius’ judgment of *antiquitas* as *horrida* seem meant in the aesthetic sense that usually applies to the combination: it is not a style (of dress, of art, of speaking) associated with former days that Tiberius seems to be criticizing, but ancient cultural—and cultic—practices. While it is true that the supply of future *flamines* may depend on a relaxation of some of the strictures of *confarreatio*, Tiberius’ claim that Augustus considered *horrida antiquitas* the enemy of *praesens usus* represents a cultural shift away from the veneration of tradition that is so necessary for preserving Roman cultic memory. Even if Tiberius may be right to advocate change in this particular instance, there is no guarantee that the general principle, if interpreted more broadly in the future, would not lead to more extreme, and therefore more potentially harmful, cultic innovations.

Immediately after the confirmation of Maluginensis’ son as *flamen*, the ramifications of Tiberius’ logic become clear when the Senate makes an additional proposal, exceeding even Tiberius’ implied wishes for the outcome to the *confarreatio* debate:

utque glisceret dignatio sacerdotum atque ipsis promptior animus foret ad capessendas caerimonias decretum Corneliae virgini, quae in locum Scantiae capiebatur, sestertium viciens, et quotiens Augusta theatrum introisset ut sedes inter Vestalium consideret. (*Ann.* 4.16.4)

(And so that priests’ esteem should increase and so that they should have a readier enthusiasm for taking up the rites, 2 million sesterces were decreed to Cornelia, the Vestal Virgin who had been elected in place of Scantia; and also a decree was passed that Augusta should sit among the Vestals’ chairs whenever she entered the theater.)

Much like the changes to *confarreatio* meant to increase the supply of candidates eligible for the flamine, these measures seek to entice people to consider priesthoods who would otherwise be put off by the stringent requirements (note *caerimonias*, echoing *caerimoniae* at *Ann.* 4.16.2 above). Again, the idea itself is not necessarily a bad one, but its execution is extreme. Certainly Vestal Virgins had received money from the state, supposedly ever

³⁵ Art: Cic. *De or.* 3.98.7–8 (of ancient paintings); cf. *Cael.* 33 (of the bushy beards depicted on archaic statues). Oratory: Cic. *Brut.* 68 (of Cato) and 83 (of Laelius); Quint. *Inst.* 10.2.17 (derisive, of modern speakers who use an affectedly old-fashioned style); Tac. *Dial.* 18.1 (of Republican orators whose style is no longer imitated). In literary criticism, *horridus* is a frequent term of disparagement (Mayer 2001, 145) and serves as an antonym for *comptus* or *politus* (Güngerich 1980, 74).

since Numa created the priesthood.³⁶ But Tiberius takes this to new heights: the gift of 2 million sesterces to newly-minted Vestal Virgin Cornelia is an outrageous sum, twice what Tiberius awarded as a consolation-prize dowry to a runner-up Vestal four years earlier (2.86.2) and twice the senatorial census requirement.³⁷ It seems that in Tiberian Rome, citizens need to be bribed into fulfilling their duties to the gods. This indicates that the lack of interest in priesthoods is part of a broader societal problem and is not confined to the particularly restricted *flamen Dialis*; a further symptom of a general decline in cultic memory in Tiberian Rome, these ancient priesthoods are no longer seen to be intrinsically valuable, but have to be combined with other incentives in order to make them attractive. While flexibility is certainly necessary for ensuring a continuous supply of available candidates for Rome's important priesthoods,³⁸ the sinister methods used to achieve this can be seen as evidence of the slow creep of declining cultic memory. Furthermore, allowing Livia to sit with the Vestals is not presented (as we might have expected) as a way of honoring the empress, but as a way of honoring the priestesses, as if the Vestal Virgins are less prestigious than Livia, and as if the priesthood needed proximity to the Imperial family to make it an attractive prospect. This, then, is another example of the increasingly indistinct boundary between religious traditions and honors for the Imperial family. Beginning here, the conflation of Imperial women and Vestal Virgins will prove to have a long and disastrous Julio-Claudian history.³⁹ The inherent importance of Rome's venerable priesthoods is diminishing in Tiberian society.

It is curious that Tacitus gives the reader no indication that this was not a new problem. Other sources indicate that attracting the daughters of noble families to become Vestal Virgins was already difficult for Augustus. In comparison to some of Augustus' changes, Tiberius may actually come off as *more* traditional. After all, Tiberius, when a new Vestal needed to be selected in AD 19, had upheld the traditional prohibition on excluding the daughters of divorced parents (*Ann.* 2.86.2), whereas Augustus had favored broadening eligibility and granted entry to freedmen's daughters when he became concerned by noblemen's unwillingness to put their daughters forward for the priesthood (Dio 55.22.5).⁴⁰ But in other respects, Tiberius'

³⁶ Livy 1.20.3; Gardner 1986, 24; Mekacher 2006, 40 and passages there cited.

³⁷ Furneaux 1896, 512; Koestermann 1965, 82.

³⁸ Mekacher and Van Haepelen 2003, 79: the sources do not indicate any concerns about a lack of eligible candidates after Tiberius, suggesting that the changes were successful.

³⁹ Dio indicates that Caligula would grant the same right to Antonia and Claudius to Messalina, and that Vestals later oversaw *diva Livia's* cult after her death (59.3.4, 60.22.2, 60.5.2). Tacitus will also explore Agrippina the Younger's appropriation of Vestal privileges; see §6.5, pp. 267–8.

⁴⁰ In practice, including the daughters of freedmen in the eligible pool of candidates probably happened very rarely, if at all (Mekacher and Van Haepelen 2003, 75).

policies can be seen as a continuation of changes Augustus had already begun. Augustus also sought to attract interest by granting Vestals a number of perks, including the use of the *domus publica* (Dio 54.27.3) and the *ius trium liberorum* (Dio 56.10.2).⁴¹ Augustus may also have already increased the amount that Vestals were given in order to attract interest in the position.⁴² If that is true, the Senate's new decision to increase that sum to 2 million sesterces can be seen as part of an insidious shift toward bribing Romans into priesthoods that began with Augustus but is getting gradually worse. Augustus also seems to have attempted, much like Tacitus' Tiberian Senate, to increase the standing of the Vestals by connecting them with the Imperial house: he swore that he would have put up his granddaughters for the priesthood if they had been of the proper age at the time (Suet. *Aug.* 31.3). Also, the *princeps'* position as *pontifex maximus*, a priesthood closely connected with the Vestals, means that families would have been attracted to the idea of offering their daughters for the position by the very fact that doing so could bring a closer connection to the emperor.⁴³ What the Tiberian Senate is doing here, therefore, is part of a larger development. By omitting any mention of these Augustan precedents, however, Tacitus puts the emphasis on Tiberian Rome, suggesting that the problem is tied up with the era's general decline in cultic memory.

The very next chapter further strengthens the impression that Livia's new seat in the theater is intended at least in part as an honor for her, and that in general the Imperial family is becoming a major focus of Rome's traditional religious establishment to a degree that Tacitus finds problematic.

Cornelio Cethego Visellio Varrone consulibus pontifices eorumque exemplo ceteri sacerdotes, cum pro incolumitate principis vota susciperent, Neronem quoque et Drusum isdem dis commendavere, non tam caritate iuvenum quam adulatione, quae moribus corruptis perinde anceps, si nulla et ubi nimia est. nam Tiberius haud umquam domui Germanici mitis, tum vero aequari adulescentes senectae suae impatienter indoluit accitosque pontifices percontatus est num id precibus Agrippinae aut minis tribuissent. et illi quidem, quamquam abnuerent, modice perstricti; etenim pars magna e propinquis ipsius aut primores civitatis erant: ceterum in senatu oratione monuit in posterum ne quis mobilis adulescentium animos praematuris honoribus ad superbiam extolleret. (*Ann.* 4.17.1–2)

⁴¹ Gardner 1986, 24; Swan 2004, 157–8, 235; Mekacher 2006, 87; Wardle 2014, 252. The *ius trium liberorum* would exempt Vestals from legal restrictions placed upon the unmarried and childless by Augustus' marriage laws.

⁴² Mekacher 2006, 40, based on Suet. *Aug.* 31.3 (*sacerdotum et numerum et dignitatem sed et commoda auxit*, "he increased both the number and dignity of priests, but also their privileges"). As Wardle 2014, 252 rightly notes, however, *commoda* is rather vague, so it may refer to benefits other than financial.

⁴³ Mekacher and Van Haepereen 2003, 80.

(In the consulship of Cornelius Cethegus and Visellius Varro, the pontiffs, and the other priests following their example, when they were discharging their vow on behalf of the *princeps*' safety, also commended Nero and Drusus to the same gods—not so much out of affection for the youths as out of flattery (which, once morals have been corrupted, is equally dangerous when it is absent and when it is excessive). For Tiberius, never indulgent where Germanicus' house was concerned, was then actually intolerably distressed that these youths were being placed on the same level as his own advanced age; and, summoning the pontiffs, he asked them whether they had done this as a concession to prayers—or threats—from Agrippina. Although they denied it, they in turn were criticized, but only lightly (for the majority of them were Tiberius' own relations or leaders within the state). But in a speech before the Senate he gave a warning for the future that no one should raise up the mercurial spirits of youths with premature honors.)

In a damning aside (*adulatione . . . nimia est*), Tacitus makes clear that *adulatio* plays a major role in accelerating societal decline: once it has become a feature of political discourse, says Tacitus, it must continue to exist.⁴⁴ Only its amount varies, and the emperor's subjects must walk a fine line as they respond to his perceived desires. As a result of that *adulatio*, decisions about the form and conduct of Rome's traditional rituals are motivated not by actual religious concerns, but by the emperor and his (real or perceived) concerns. Like a black hole warping space-time, the strong gravitational pull of the emperor and his family distort cultic memory. Here, at least, Tiberius pushes back: his speech in the Senate seems to be a ruling on a religious matter that is, for him, unusually clear in its delineation of which members of the Imperial family may not be included in the annual vows. Given Tiberius' consistent lack of clarity on similar issues throughout the *Annals* so far, it is tempting to read this as a step in the right direction.

But that is not the whole story. For one thing, even if they are motivated by a toxic *adulatio* that Tacitus deplors, it is hard to blame the priests entirely, given the way Tiberius has behaved in the past: commending these children to the Senate's care just one year previously (*Ann.* 4.8.4–5) gave the impression that Tiberius felt genuine concern for them.⁴⁵ On a cultic level, too, there seems to be no apparent reason why this particular *adulatio*-driven modification of traditional rituals should have drawn Tiberius' wrath, since he expressed little disapproval when cultic honors were decreed for the children's father (2.83). The only reason Tiberius protests now is not any concern for cult, but rather jealousy that the youths seem to be approaching his own level in the priests' eyes and pressure brought to bear by Sejanus in his drive to eliminate Imperial rivals (as we learn in 4.17.3). Tacitus' observations on the machinations of fortune and the gods' anger at Rome that opened *Annals* 4 are coming to fruition here; the scene recalls the image from *Ann.* 4.1.1, of a

⁴⁴ Cf. Davies 2004, 183.

⁴⁵ Martin and Woodman 1989, 144.

savage god lending his ear to a savage man. Tiberius scolds the priests at Sejanus' insistence that he needs to make an example of these alleged partisans of Agrippina (4.17.3). So it is *adulatio* that causes the proposals to be made in the first place, and the personal jealousies of the savage Sejanus that induce Tiberius to make an example of the senators and the pontiffs, rather than any sense that it is bad for Roman cultic memory when *adulatio* leads Nero and Drusus to be venerated in this way.

4.4 CULTIC MEMORY, AUGUSTUS' DEIFICATION, AND TIBERIUS' REPUTATION

With this background, a delegation from Further Spain arrives in Rome in AD 24, asking the Senate's permission to build a temple to Tiberius and Livia.⁴⁶ Here more than ever before in the *Annals*, the issues of cultic memory (the repeated and sustained worship of gods, including Augustus) and memory in general (how Tiberius will go down in history) are explicitly equated, as the emperor refuses the temple and tries to push the discussion in the direction of his reputation in the future. The result is an important comment on the nature of emperor cult, for the passage raises two crucial questions: how does Augustus' deification shape the way that Tiberius interacts with his subjects? And how sincere are the characters in the *Annals*, particularly Tiberius, in their belief that Augustus' divinity is real and important?

The passage's immediate context gives a strong impression that Tacitus wishes more than ever to underline the themes of memory and emperor cult. During the trial and condemnation of Cremutius Cordus (*Ann.* 4.34–5), the example par excellence of the savagery associated with Tiberius' reign, "memory is in the air," and it is ultimately impossible for the memory of his resistance to be wiped out.⁴⁷ Recent developments involving emperor cult have shown Tiberius, too, in a harsh light, when the Cyzicenes lose their status as a free city, which they have held ever since providing assistance to Rome in the Mithridatic Wars, as punishment for neglecting Augustus' rites (*Ann.* 4.36.2). Tacitus does not tell us what exactly the Cyzicenes' neglect is supposed to have consisted of,⁴⁸ nor who makes the accusation, but the consequences are troubling and contrary to the sentiment Tiberius expressed at 1.73.3 ("heaven had not been decreed to his father so that the honor could be turned

⁴⁶ Some of the arguments presented in this section previously appeared in a talk delivered at the "Commemorating Augustus" conference hosted at the University of Leeds in August 2014.

⁴⁷ Pelling 2010, 366. On Cremutius Cordus, see Moles 1998.

⁴⁸ Dio 57.24.6 indicates that they began, but never completed, a temple to Augustus.

to the destruction of Roman citizens"). While the Cyzicenes are not Roman citizens, and are not faced with death, the situations are similar: emperor cult is being used as a stick to beat those who do not participate properly. This echoes the criteria for granting temple asylum (3.60–3 and 4.14), where either religious credentials or services to the Roman people could earn a benefit. In one of those earlier debates, the community's conduct in the Mithridatic Wars was a feather in the cap of Cos (4.14.2), but this time that positive memory is apparently overshadowed and erased by a real or perceived lapse in the honors for *divus Augustus*. This underlines the subjectivity inherent in collective and cultic memory (in that it is always up to an individual interpreter to decide what is more or less crucial to commemorate), and the difficulty subjects of Rome had in participating in emperor cult in a way that would be perceived positively at the seat of power in Rome.⁴⁹

Memory in the form of exemplarity also plays a role in the discussion of the Spaniards' request, which is strongly informed by the right to build a similar temple recently granted to Asia (*Ann.* 4.37.1 *exemplo Asiae*), given in thanks for the vengeance perpetrated against Lucilius Capito when he was punished for gubernatorial misconduct in that province. The Spanish temple would have similar overtones of vengeance given the recent condemnation and exile of Vibius Serenus, proconsul of Further Spain (4.13.3).⁵⁰ The Spaniards have taken from Asia a template not only for building a temple to Tiberius, but also for the problematic motivations for building it. The Spanish temple thus also becomes a case study in short-term memory: just two years later, the decision made about the Asian temple is already having an impact on commemorations of Tiberius.

Tacitus tells us that Tiberius feels compelled to speak because of accusations from critics "who were accusing him in rumor of having deviated toward ambition" (*Ann.* 4.37.1 *iis, quorum rumore arguebatur in ambitionem flexisse*). It is certainly true that throughout the *Annals*, Tiberius has failed to say explicitly which divine or divine-looking honors, if any, he believes to be appropriate for himself and other members of the Imperial family, and this lack of clarity has frequently caused problems. The Asian temple is marked as an outlier, a deviation from what is popularly perceived as a generally humble policy of refusing such honors.⁵¹ The critics' accusations that Tiberius has changed his mind therefore gain a certain amount of credibility from Tacitus' narrative: Tiberius has never clearly said what he wants.

⁴⁹ Pelling 2010, 368. Cf. Martin and Woodman 1989, 186.

⁵⁰ Shotter 1989, 167. Cf. Furneaux 1896, 534; Koestermann 1965, 128. For Vibius Serenus the elder see *Ann.* 4.13.2, 4.30.1.

⁵¹ Seager 1972, 147; likewise Furneaux 1896, 534 on 37.3 *silentii*—"it is implied that he had only tacitly assented to the permissive decree." Cf. Koestermann 1965, 129.

Tiberius' response will not do much to dispel that negative image:

[4.37.2] scio, patres conscripti, constantiam meam a plerisque desideratam quod Asiae civitatibus nuper idem istud petentibus non sim adversatus. (3) ergo et prioris silentii defensionem et quid in futurum statuerim simul aperiam. cum divus Augustus sibi atque urbi Romae templum apud Pergamum sisti non prohibuisset, qui omnia facta dictaque eius vice legis observem, placitum iam exemplum promptius secutus sum quia cultui meo veneratio senatus adiungebatur. ceterum ut semel recepisse veniam habuerit, ita per omnis provincias effigie numinum sacrari ambitiosum, superbum; et vane scet Augusti honor si promiscis adulationibus vulgatur.

[4.38] Ego me, patres conscripti, mortalem esse et hominum officia fungi satisque habere si locum principem impleam et vos testor et meminisse posteros volo; qui satis superque memoriae meae tribuent, ut maioribus meis dignum, rerum vestrarum providum, constantem in periculis, offensionum pro utilitate publica non pavidum credant. (2) haec mihi in animis vestris templa, hae pulcherrimae effigies et mansurae. nam quae saxo struuntur si iudicium posterorum in odium vertit, pro sepulchris spernuntur. (3) proinde socios civis et deos et deas ipsos⁵² precor, hos ut mihi ad finem usque vitae quietam et intellegendam humani divinique iuris mentem duint, illos ut, quandoque concessero, cum laude et bonis recordationibus facta atque famam nominis mei prosequantur.

([4.37.2] I know, conscript fathers, that many people have looked for consistency from me because I did not oppose the communities of Asia when they recently made the same request. (3) Therefore I shall both make a defense for my earlier silence, and at the same time reveal what I have decided for the future. Since Divine Augustus had not prohibited a temple for himself and the city of Rome from being set up in Pergamum, I (since I observe all his deeds and words as if they were law) followed that example, already a pleasing one, all the more promptly because veneration of the Senate was joined to my own cult. But, although a single acceptance will be pardoned, nevertheless it would be ambitious and haughty to be worshipped in all provinces with an image like those of divinities, and the honor for Augustus will vanish if it is made common by indiscriminate flattery.

[4.38] I call upon you, conscript fathers, as witnesses, and I want posterity to remember, that I am mortal and perform the offices of men, and consider it sufficient to fill the place of *princeps*. They will contribute more than enough to my memory if they believe that I am worthy of my ancestors, that I exercise forethought over your affairs, that I am constant in times of danger, and that I am not afraid to incur resentment for the public good. (2) These are my temples in your hearts, these are the most beautiful and lasting images; for the ones that are built of stone are spurned like tombs if the judgment of posterity turns to hatred. (3) Accordingly, I pray to allies, citizens, and the gods and goddesses themselves—the gods, that until the end of my life they may grant me a mind that

⁵² For this correction of *M's et deos et deos ipsos*, see Martin and Woodman 1989, 191.

is quiet and understanding of human and divine law; and the allies and citizens, that, whenever I depart, they attend my deeds and the reputation of my name with praise and happy recollections.)

At the beginning of his speech, Tiberius sets out his two-part agenda: to explain his previous lack of clarity on the issue when he allowed the Asians to build a temple, and to reveal the principle he will use in responding to such petitions in the future. He disposes of the Asian temple in one sentence (*Ann.* 4.37.3 *cum divus Augustus... adiungebatur*): Augustus had not refused (*non prohibuisset*) a temple in Pergamum, and that is all the precedent Tiberius needs. Tiberius has been careful to phrase his attitude toward the Asian temple similarly, in negative terms (4.37.2 *non sim adversatus*), rather than as outright acceptance or encouragement. This language minimizes Tiberius' own role in the growth of cultic commemoration of himself;⁵³ he does not actually blame the ambassadors or the Senate, but his delicate wording acknowledges that he is not solely responsible for such honors (as Tacitus, too, has repeatedly implied). The remainder of the speech enumerates Tiberius' reasoning behind his new policy of refusing cult: (1) accepting the Asian temple is merely a single lapse in Tiberius' general quest not to be ambitious or impious; (2) allowing himself to be worshipped would cheapen the cult of Augustus; and (3) he wishes to be remembered by posterity for his good qualities as a mortal leader, which he insists is more valuable than cultic commemoration. In (2), Tiberius refutes his critics, echoing the language of their criticism (4.37.3 *ambitiosum*; cf. 4.37.1 *ambitionem*), and labels cults of himself as *adulationes* detracting from the honor of Augustus' worship.⁵⁴

Tiberius' speech is not only a humble assertion of his own inferiority to *divus Augustus*, but also a powerful manifesto broadcasting what he claims are his deeply-held personal views on the practice of commemoration. Temples and cult images are not the mechanisms by which Tiberius wants to be embedded in Roman collective memory after his death; physical *lieux de mémoire* are viewed by the emperor as less effective than conceptual ones in the minds of his subjects. The idea that personal remembrance and literary commemorations are superior to physical monuments is of course widespread in ancient literature; indeed, this is the mode of remembrance Tacitus himself elsewhere enjoins for commemorating Agricola after his death (*Agr.* 46).⁵⁵ But Tiberius' spin on the idea is slightly different, and more negative. The problem, as he sees it, is not simply that physical monuments, unlike literary ones or the personal memories of individuals, can fall into decay, although that is certainly part of the meaning of *pro sepulcris spernuntur*, given Romans'

⁵³ Shotter 1989, 168.

⁵⁴ Cf. Pelling 2010, 369.

⁵⁵ See Woodman 2014, 326 and the passages there cited. The similarities between *Agr.* 46 and *Ann.* 4.38.2 have also been noted by Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 315; Martin and Woodman 1989, 189.

constant fear that their gravestones would be neglected.⁵⁶ Those physical *lieux de mémoire* are hostages to fortune, in that if Tiberius' reputation should ever change for the worse, they can become sites of abuse. As Pelling points out, another commonplace in Roman discussions of tombs is the fear that passers-by will urinate or defecate on them, an act of desecration for which Tiberius' "spurning" (*spernuntur*) is a polite euphemism.⁵⁷ It is not merely oblivion that Tiberius fears will befall any physical memorials, but a warping of their intended significance: if future Romans develop a negative view of Tiberius and his legacy, *lieux de mémoire* would come to commemorate not Tiberius' virtues, but his shortcomings. This reveals, in a way, a relatively solid understanding of memorials and commemoration. Tiberius recognizes that no one can control how monuments, once erected, will be perceived, and that it is ultimately up to the viewer to determine a building's meaning regardless of the intentions of its builder. But Tiberius also reveals his paranoia: his assertion that he wants to be remembered only positively could cover up a fearful certainty that he will not go down in cultural memory as a good *princeps*. Perhaps aware of the very real possibility that Roman cultural memory in the future might be hostile to him, he would rather the "monuments" available for desecration should be non-physical ones, so that his shameful reputation should not be broadcast. This is a different kind of misunderstanding: Since practically anything (e.g. a historical account, a story transmitted orally⁵⁸) can work to preserve memory, even without physical memorials and their potential for desecration, there is still no guarantee that Tiberius will be remembered positively. Instead of building "temples in their hearts," Tiberius' subjects could just as easily build *tombs* in their hearts which they (metaphorically) treat as latrines.

Furthermore, Tiberius' comparison of temples and cult statues to desecrated tombs misses an essential point: the proposed Spanish temple would be a site of *cultic* memory, where regular acts of worship would presumably be performed. A temple carries the implication that its god will be actively embedded into the cultic memory of the community through a calendar of repeated rituals. Presumably, once such rituals were in place, according to the principle of cultic memory they would have to be continued, and at any rate it seems extreme to suggest that a temple could suffer the kind of excretory desecration Romans feared for their tombs. Whatever the personal opinions among the people of the future about Tiberius' reign, if a temple to him were built they would presumably be obliged to continue commemorating him

⁵⁶ See Martin and Woodman 1989, 191 on the "proverbial" neglect of gravestones.

⁵⁷ Pelling 2010, 370. A prime example is Petron. 71.8; see also the lists of similar passages at Smith 1975, 197 and Schmeling 2011, 296.

⁵⁸ See Nora 1992 for types of *lieux de mémoire*. On the ability of historical accounts like Tacitus' to create and perpetuate Tiberius' memory, see Pelling 2010, 370–1.

there when they worshipped him as a god. Indeed, the ways Tiberius talks about himself leave some ambiguity about his own relationship to the Imperial cult. For example, the phrase *effigie numinum* (*Ann.* 4.37.3) could be a “compressed” expression “for the kind of statue that divinities normally have.”⁵⁹ It could also mean “with the *appearance* of divinity,”⁶⁰ but (the implication goes) without its substance; this interpretation would indicate that Tiberius is claiming the honors proposed by the Spaniards would aim to make him god-like, but not necessarily divine. If we read *effigie numinum* this way, Tiberius is attempting to skirt delicately around the fact that with such honors his subjects would in fact be treating him as a god. Tiberius then asserts even more explicitly that he is actually mortal (4.38.1); but his sincerity has been doubtful when he has made such assertions before, as during his consolation to the public on the death of Germanicus (3.6.3),⁶¹ so how seriously can he mean it now? The prayer with which Tiberius closes his speech (4.38.3) also appears laudably humble, reinforcing the distance between himself and the “real” gods,⁶² but it also “strike[s] an ominous note,” since “by this time the forces were already at work that were systematically to undermine it until his grasp of human and divine justice became first capricious and intermittent and then utterly warped.”⁶³ So even when Tiberius seems truly to separate himself from the divine, his words might appear disingenuous to those who have watched the injustices of his reign.

The picture we get of Tiberius, therefore, is of a man who rejects but does not quite comprehend the workings of memory, particularly cultic memory. He wants to be remembered, but does not completely comprehend how memory works. In attempting to repel the accusations of *ambitio*, he reveals his paranoid fears of being reviled by future commemorators, while also failing to recognize his ultimate inability to control the future judgment of his reign. In rejecting a cultic mode of memory so that his subjects will not accuse him of arrogance in the present, Tiberius cuts off one mechanism that might actually work against negative judgments in the future.

It is significant that Augustan precedent features in Tiberius’ explanations both of why he accepted the temple in Asia and why he is refusing the one in Spain. The example of Augustus, who had allowed a temple of himself and Roma to be built in Pergamum (*Ann.* 4.37.3), could indeed have given Tiberius ample precedent for allowing this Spanish temple to be built, yet he uses it only to justify the temple in Asia. Tiberius’ second reason for refusing cult reproduces one of the arguments made by the anonymous critics of Augustus’ deification: the assertion that worshipping Augustus would mean “no honor

⁵⁹ So Martin and Woodman 1989, 188.

⁶⁰ *OLD* s.v. *effigies* 4: “outward appearance aspect shape, or guise;” “in the form or likeness of.”

⁶¹ See §3.2, pp. 126–7.

⁶² Cf. Levick 1976, 253 n. 3.

⁶³ Seager 1972, 147.

was left for the gods" (1.10.6 *nihil deum honoribus relictum*). Tiberius adopts similar reasoning when he claims Augustus' honor will "vanish" if a second member of the Julio-Claudian house is also venerated. Tiberius therefore seems to agree with the basic principle, once voiced by the *critics* of the Imperial cult, that diminishing the barriers for entry to divinity cheapens the honor that that divinity constitutes. But there is an important difference: now, implicitly, Augustus deserves such honor as much as the other gods once did. Rather than cheapening the divinity of the "real" gods, Augustus' divinity (Tiberius claims) itself now needs protecting, lest it in turn should be cheapened. Tiberius again attempts to draw a line between himself and Augustus, to emphasize that unlike his predecessor, Tiberius is mortal (4.38.1); this is similar to Tiberius' sentiments at 1.11.1.

Yet although Tiberius seems to be hitting all the right notes in arguing for a separation between divine beings and mortal *principes*, and although Tacitus reminds us at the close of the speech that Tiberius remained consistent in rejecting worship of himself for the rest of his life (*Ann.* 4.38.4),⁶⁴ certain features of Tacitus' narrative belie Tiberius' apparently sincere devotion to *divus Augustus*. The Pergamene temple is superfluous to Tiberius' argument; it would have been enough for Tiberius merely to say that he refused this Spanish temple because, unlike the others, it did not also include veneration of the Senate. The *vanescet Augusti honor* argument is likewise unnecessary: merely to say "my accepting a temple once is pardonable, but it will not happen again" would have been an entirely sufficient defense of Tiberius' position without requiring him to mention Augustus at all.⁶⁵ If these arguments are not logically necessary, Tiberius must be making them in order to elicit a particular response from his audience. The argument that the honors for *divus Augustus* are at risk of losing their meaningfulness can only be effective if the deification of Augustus is now widely accepted, and if Augustus is sufficiently beloved as a deity that people will agree that his divine honors are worth protecting. And although Tiberius' critics find fault with him for refusing the Spanish temple, the nature of their criticism seems to indicate that whatever it is they object to in Tiberius' speech, it is *not* his assertion that *divus Augustus*' honors need to be protected.

perstititque posthac secretis etiam sermonibus aspernari talem sui cultum. quod alii modestiam, multi, quia diffideret, quidam ut degeneris animi interpretabantur. optumos quippe mortalium altissima cupere: sic Herculem et Liberum apud Graecos, Quirinum apud nos deum numero additos: melius Augustum, qui speraverit. cetera principibus statim adesse: unum insatiabiliter parandum, prosperam sui memoriam; nam contemptu famae contemni virtutes. (*Ann.* 4.38.4–5)

⁶⁴ Cf. Pelling 2010, 373 and discussions cited there (n. 32).

⁶⁵ For both points, see Cowan 2009, 197–8.

(And after this Tiberius persisted, even in his intimate conversations, in rejecting such worship of himself. Some interpreted this as moderation, many reckoned that it was because he lacked confidence, and certain people saw it as the mark of a degenerate spirit. For (they said) the best of mortals desired the most exalted things; thus among the Greeks Hercules and Liber, and among us Quirinus, had been added to the number of the gods. Augustus had done better, because he had hoped. For princes, everything else comes immediately into their possession; the one thing they had to be insatiable about preparing was a favorable memory for themselves. For in this contempt for reputation, contempt was also being heaped upon virtues.)

The phrase *optumos . . . mortalium* responds to Tiberius' assertion of his mortality at *Ann.* 4.38.1, but its tone is unclear. Perhaps the critics are sincere, take Tiberius' refusal at face value, and criticize his failure to reach for divinity to ensure his reputation as other exceptional mortals had done before him. Alternatively, they may be being sarcastic,⁶⁶ delivering a biting response to the misapprehensions and uncertainties in Tiberius' speech. Either way, the critics show a tendency to assume that the *princeps*' position automatically nudges him toward the divine. Criticizing Tiberius for being "degenerate" from Augustus indicates that they fail to understand the message about memory which Tiberius has been trying to convey and that they define memory above all as the cultic memory Augustus longed for and Tiberius rejected. Their response also implies that they see certain mortals (like Hercules, Liber, Quirinus) as worthy of deification, and that Augustus was among that number, or at least that it was not far-fetched for him to think that he was.

Compared with the discussions at the beginning of *Annals* 1, public opinion about *divus Augustus* therefore has shifted in a striking way: whereas some once criticized Augustus for wanting to become a god because it cheapened the honors available to the "real" gods (*Ann.* 1.10.6), now Tiberius is criticized for *not* wanting to become a god. Pelling suggests that this inconsistency is a sign that "as far as his critics are concerned, Tiberius cannot do anything right."⁶⁷ But perhaps Tacitus is trying to show not that Tiberius' subjects are out to get him, but rather, that public opinion on Augustus' deification has actually changed over time, or was never wholly critical.⁶⁸ Popular conception of memory and its mechanisms has been so shaped by the dynamics of ruler-veneration following Augustus' deification that people now think that the act of commemoration *must* include cultic memory. This criticism, unjust as it may be, is Tacitus' clearest statement yet of societal acceptance of emperor

⁶⁶ So Martin and Woodman 1989, 192.

⁶⁷ Pelling 2010, 369. Cf. Martin and Woodman 1989, 186–7; Sinclair 1991; Davies 2004, 178–9.

⁶⁸ Pelling 2010, 373 does admit this possibility in passing.

worship, an important marker of the extent to which Roman cultural memory has changed as a result of the principate.

4.5 AFTERMATH OF THE SPANISH TEMPLE REFUSAL

The aftershocks of this discussion, and the questions it raises about cultic memory, reverberate through the succeeding chapters, even in episodes where emperor cult is not directly at issue. Shortly after the Spanish temple episode, in a meeting of the Senate in which other cultic matters are discussed (*Ann.* 4.43), some of Tiberius' subjects follow the lead given by their *princeps* in *Ann.* 4.37–8 and use argumentative strategies that minimize religious memory. Sparta and Messene appear before the Senate to settle their disagreement over who should control the temple of Diana Limnatis, located in the borderlands between Laconia and Messenia.⁶⁹ Their arguments are similar to those of the asylum embassies of *Ann.* 3.61–3, in that each side narrates its history of control over the shrine, referring to the interventions of Imperial powers, such as the Macedonians and the Romans, at various points in the past, and citing the decrees made by each as proof that their city should control the sanctuary.⁷⁰ Each city also cites works of literature—history and poetry (4.43.1 *annalium memoria vatunque carminibus*; 4.43.3 *vatum, annalium . . . testimonia*)—that support its case, tying Tacitus' discussion into a long literary tradition of chronicling the conflicts between Spartans and Messenians. The Messenians also cite epigraphical evidence from the sanctuary itself (4.43.2 *monimentaue eius rei sculpta saxis et aere prisco manere*, “reminders of this fact remained, engraved on rock and ancient bronze”), which they say bolsters their claim. Two kinds of *lieux de mémoire*, then, are brought into play: literature and physical monuments. Yet what neither side mentions at all is cult; in this, Sparta's and Messene's arguments are more like those of the embassies of 4.14. Neither city lays claim, for example, to a decree of a god or oracle as the basis for “ownership” of the cult (as Ephesus and Smyrna both had; cf. 3.61.1, 63.3), nor to the presence of gods or heroes in its territory (cf. 3.61.1–2, 62.4).⁷¹ This time, unlike in the similar discussions of asylum rights, the Senate easily comes to a decision in favor of Messenia (4.43.4 *ita secundum Messenios datum*), apparently because the senators did not wish to overturn

⁶⁹ Martin and Woodman 1989, 201; it is unclear what exactly the states would gain by this (money? prestige?). Arbitration by a neutral third party in such disputes was regular in the Greek East (Bianchini 2006, 95–6). On the shrine, see Pausanias 4.31; Strabo 8.4.9.

⁷⁰ See Luraghi 2008, 16–27 for an explication of these interventions and the changing ownership of the sanctuary.

⁷¹ The Messenians mention Hercules, but only as a temporal point of reference for the division of the Peloponnesus amongst the Heraclids (*Ann.* 4.43.2).

the most recent decision on the matter, by Atidius Geminus, praetor of Achaea, who ruled in favor of Messenia.⁷² Geminus' decision was itself a reversal of Octavian's assignment of the shrine to Sparta (4.43.1 *C. Caesaris et M. Antonii sententia redditum*) in gratitude for the polis' assistance against the tyrannicides.⁷³ It is noteworthy that the Senate follows the most recent, rather than the oldest, precedent. The particularly confusing nature of the Sparta–Messene conflict, and the recent shift in Rome's support that contravenes Augustus' policy, would therefore appear to make this a *less* straightforward decision than what the Senate had to grapple with in the asylum discussions; yet this is the only such case where Tacitus explicitly states that it came to a clear decision in favor of one side. When the cities do not focus on ancient history and the gods in their arguments, and when there is a clear and recent precedent to guide their decision-making, disputes regarding cult are apparently easier for the Senate to digest. And their abandonment of Augustan precedent is the opposite of the sentiment Tiberius expressed in his refusal of the Spanish temple, when he said that he "observe[s] all his deeds and words as if they were law." The notion of Augustus' unmatched specialness that Tiberius was trying to peddle there did not stop the critics from complaining about his refusal of the Spanish temple; nor, apparently, did his general sentiment catch on. The confusion of the Spanish temple episode has perhaps also given the Senate cause to abandon Augustan precedent, the principle that has guided much of the religious decision-making in the *Annals* so far.

Tacitus uses another discussion of cult matters appended to this discussion of Sparta and Messene to emphasize the growing normalization of emperor cult. Segesta asks Tiberius to restore Venus' shrine on Mount Eryx, using a strategy designed to appeal to Tiberius by emphasizing Venus' role as ancestor of the Julio-Claudians (4.43.4 *nota memorantes de origine eius et laeta Tiberio*, "recalling things about its origin that were well known—and pleasing to Tiberius"). Aeneas himself founded the temple, and it was closely associated with Anchises' implicit deification;⁷⁴ the temple smacks of Julio-Claudian divinity. Unlike Messene and Sparta, who dealt with the Senate, Segesta's proposal is addressed directly to the emperor and is calculated to appeal to his sense of pride in his house's long history, predating Augustus by many centuries, of claiming divine ancestry; perhaps this is an indication that Tiberius' assertion that he wants to preserve Augustus' cultic honors has been read by his subjects as a general enthusiasm for other divine individuals within the Julio-Claudian house.

⁷² Luraghi 2008, 23. Geminus is not otherwise known; he is probably to be dated to the Augustan (Koestermann 1965, 147; Shotter 1989, 173) or early Tiberian (Luraghi 2008, 22) period.

⁷³ Luraghi 2008, 21–3.

⁷⁴ Virg. *Aen.* 5.759; cf. Williams 1960, 185.

When it comes to enacting the cultic memory of *divus Augustus*, however, Tiberius' actions raise questions as to how sincerely he is concerned with worshipping Augustus, for the acts of cult he actually performs for the *divus* are frequently cloaked in political considerations. Two episodes dealing with the worship of Augustus are embedded in the context of a dispute with Agrippina the Elder, showing how members of the Imperial family can clash with each other as they seek to appropriate Augustus' cultic memory. We have already seen how Livia's dedication of a statue of Augustus (*Ann.* 3.64.2) upon her recovery from illness allows Tacitus to explore the complex interrelation between worship of the dead emperor, competition among his descendants, and the use of Augustus' cult apparatus to honor living members of the Imperial family.⁷⁵ But a more direct confrontation on these issues breaks out between Tiberius and Agrippina, attempting to defend her second cousin Claudia Pulchra on charges of adultery, poisoning, and spells (*devotiones*) directed at the emperor (4.52.1):

Agrippina semper atrox, tum et periculo propinquae accensa, pergit ad Tiberium ac forte sacrificantem patri repperit. quo initio invidiae non eiusdem ait mactare divo Augusto victimas et posteros eius insectari. non in effigies mutas divinum spiritum transfusum: se imaginem veram, caelesti sanguine ortam, intellegere discrimen, suscipere sordis. frustra Pulchram praescribi cui sola exitii causa sit quod Agrippinam stulte prorsus ad cultum delegerit oblita Sosiae ob eadem adflictae. audita haec raram occulti pectoris vocem elicuere, arreptamque⁷⁶ Graeco versu admonuit non ideo laedi quia non regnaret. Pulchra et Furnius damnantur. (4.52.2–3)

(Agrippina, always defiant but on that occasion also incensed by the danger to her kinswoman, went to Tiberius and by chance found him sacrificing to his father. That was the beginning of her malice; she said that the same man should not be slaughtering victims to *divus Augustus* and persecuting his descendants. His divine breath had not been transfused into mute statues: she, his true image, born of celestial blood, understood the danger to herself and was adopting rags. It was pointless that Pulchra's name was the heading on the charge sheet, when the only reason for her destruction was the fact that she had quite stupidly chosen Agrippina to worship, forgetting about Sosia who had been struck down for the same reason. Hearing all this elicited a rare utterance from that secretive breast, and, grabbing her, he warned her in a Greek verse that she was not being harmed, since she was not the one ruling. Pulchra and Furinus [her alleged lover] were condemned.)

This is an extremely rare moment in the *Annals* when someone is depicted actually performing a cult act for *divus Augustus*, and it results in an argument about the proper way to worship him. The question of Augustus' divinity is

⁷⁵ For the context, see §3.5, pp. 160–3.

⁷⁶ I follow Martin and Woodman's (1989, 217) emendation of M's *correptamque*.

not in doubt; *divinum spiritum* and *caelesti sanguine* strongly affirm that Agrippina believes her grandfather is a god, just as much as Tiberius' sacrifices suggest his sincerity. But the two disagree on how best to commemorate him, raising again the same issues we saw in the Spanish temple debate. Tiberius (when it came to himself, at least) rejected cultic memory, preferring that those who commemorated him after his death should do so "in their hearts," while his critics thought he should aim for deification. Now the roles are reversed: Tiberius performs cult acts, while Agrippina believes reverence for the *divus* should also encompass humane treatment of herself and Augustus' other descendants.⁷⁷ Although she does not suggest that Augustus should not have a cult image or that sacrifices should not be made to it, Agrippina also echoes Tiberius' rejection of cult statues (*effigies*; cf. 4.37.3, 38.2), claiming that the best images of Augustus are not physical statues, but Augustus' blood and image as preserved in his true descendants.⁷⁸ This is a connection to the *divus* that Tiberius cannot claim for himself, since he is not a blood descendant of Augustus.⁷⁹ Agrippina's rhetoric of emperor cult and blood connections perhaps gives a certain overtone to her remarks that Pulchra's mistake was to choose Agrippina as her focus of *cultus*. The word has a perfectly ordinary, non-ritual meaning, signifying devotion or loyalty to a (mortal) friend or other figure deserving of respect.⁸⁰ But the religious nature of the conversation Tiberius and Agrippina are having opens up additional possible meanings of the word, much as with *preces* in *Ann.* 1.11.1, so that it could also signify "veneration" as rendered to a deity.⁸¹ Agrippina's remark encapsulates the hidden connection between cultic memory and Imperial power that has run through all of the *Annals* up to this point: if to be *princeps* is to be venerated, then to be venerated (as Agrippina is by Pulchra) is to be thought equivalent to, or a threat to, the *princeps*, and it is this to which, Agrippina insinuates, Tiberius really objects.

But Agrippina's insight into the realities of power does not make them any less real, and the outcome of the debate shows how entrenched the dynamics of Imperial veneration, and the hierarchies that go with them, really are. Tiberius' response to Agrippina puts her in her place,⁸² implying that with these complaints about his methods of worshipping Augustus, she is getting

⁷⁷ *Posteris* probably refers to both Agrippina and Claudia Pulchra, Augustus' great-niece, a descendant of his sister Octavia (cf. Martin and Woodman 1989, 216).

⁷⁸ Compare also the reaction to Nero at *Ann.* 4.15.3 (and see §4.3, p. 177). Martin and Woodman 1989, 217 note that *transfusum* activates "the language of popular Pythagoreanism," although since Augustus was still alive when she was born, she cannot truly claim to be his reincarnation.

⁷⁹ Cf. Shotter 1989, 182. ⁸⁰ OLD s.v. *cultus*² 11.

⁸¹ OLD s.v. *cultus*² 10. On 1.11.1, see §1.2, p. 35.

⁸² Suet. *Tib.* 53.1 also reports the incident. The Greek verse Tiberius was quoting is unknown; Shotter 1989, 182 compares Aristotle *Politics* 3.2.6 = 1277a.

above her station: she, after all, is not *princeps*, despite whatever “veneration” Pulchra may have thrown her way. Agrippina certainly seems to know that she is running a risk; even before Tiberius’ response, she acknowledges that she still must supplicate him in rags,⁸³ and soon, like everyone else, she prays to Tiberius, albeit with characteristic indignation (4.53.1 *mox invidiam et preces orditur*). Even from the beginning of his account of the argument, Tacitus hinted that her intercessions would be ill-omened: “There was an upheaval in the *princeps*’ house, in order to form a beginning for the progression of destruction in store for Agrippina” (4.52.1 *commota principis domo, ut series futuri in Agrippinam exitii inciperet*). The language recalls the “will of fate” purpose clause at *Ann.* 3.13.2,⁸⁴ and the last sentence of the episode, with its report of a rumor that Tiberius planned to poison her (4.54.2), reinforces the impression that Agrippina is doomed, as Germanicus had predicted on his deathbed (2.72.1). Tied up with this ominous language is Agrippina’s unwillingly worshipful attitude to Tiberius himself: even prayers to the *princeps* will not stop her death. So in Tiberian Rome, and particularly in the aftermath of the Spanish temple discussion, matters of Imperial cult take on a sinister quality. It is only the emperor who may define the “proper” way to worship Augustus, and any criticisms of his definition are seen as a threat to his position and will be punished accordingly.

The emperor’s extraordinary role in making decisions about the cultic memory of *divus Augustus* continues to be evident in an episode following directly on his arguments with Agrippina: a resumption of discussion of the Asian temple of Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate (*Ann.* 4.15.3), left unfinished because no decision about its exact site was ever made. The competition amongst various Asian cities wishing to host the temple recalls the asylum assemblies and the recent arbitration between Sparta and Messene.⁸⁵ This “contest” is also held before the Senate, but Tacitus highlights Tiberius’ constant presence, suggesting that the Senate’s ruling is not necessarily freely made, or at least is carefully supervised. The Senate, presided over by Tiberius, must now discuss where they want to site a temple dedicated to venerating them both (and Livia), and the dramatic irony of this fact permeates the episode.⁸⁶ The awkwardness is never acknowledged, but the Senate and magistrates seem strangely passive. When the vote eventually favors locating the temple at Smyrna, Tacitus’ brief, formulaic expression implies no discussion whatsoever, and gives no indication of any dissenting voices: “And so, when asked for their opinion, the fathers preferred the Smyrnaeans” (4.56.3 *ita rogati*

⁸³ Wearing rags may imply a gesture of supplication (Naiden 2006, 58–60) or simply the garb of widowhood (Shotter 1989, 182).

⁸⁴ Martin and Woodman 1989, 216; see §3.2, p. 132.

⁸⁵ See §4.5, pp. 192–3.

⁸⁶ Price 1984, 67 views this circumstance more positively, as “help[ing] to dissipate any awkwardness in the emperor accepting his own honours.”

sententiam patres Zmyrnaeos praetulere).⁸⁷ Another source explicitly reports that the vote was a landslide: Smyrna received the votes of 400 senators, while only seven voted for the other ten Asian cities combined.⁸⁸ This could signify the senators' genuine enthusiasm for the temple and for Smyrna as its site. But it is also possible that the Senate is so well attended, and so unanimous, simply because the emperor is present and because a vote is being taken on something that has to do with his own public commemoration.⁸⁹ As Talbert notes, "The natural conclusion must be that the *sententia* in favor of Smyrna was put first, thereby resolving the matter without further ado."⁹⁰ This seems to imply that the senators do not much care where the temple is built; when the *princeps senatus* said, "Those in favor of Smyrna, go to this side of the room,"⁹¹ perhaps the senators all went, not because they truly believed that Smyrna was the superior option, but simply to end the proceedings. Lack of enthusiasm is similarly suggested by the fact that they delegate the task of overseeing the temple's actual construction, a process which takes several steps. Instead of mandating M. Lepidus, governor of Asia, to see to it, first another senator Vibius Marsus mandates that Lepidus be granted a supernumerary legate to take on the task. Lepidus, demurring "out of modesty" (4.56.3 *per modestiam*), refuses to nominate this legate directly, and someone must be chosen by lot. Lepidus, marked out by Tacitus elsewhere for his avoidance of the "savage flatteries" (4.20.2 *saevae adulationes*) of his peers, does not even want the job of choosing the person who will erect the temple. This suggests that the whole thing smacks, at least to some senators, of flattery, and at any rate is not something about which they seem to be strongly moved. This apathy or distaste is a far cry from the first discussion of temple asylum, where Tacitus made a point of highlighting the senators' freedom, even if that turned out to be illusory (3.61.1). It is also a departure from the last discussion of temples for Tiberius: when the emperor refused a temple in Spain, he was roundly criticized for rejecting a cultic mode of memory (4.38.4–5). But now that the senators have a role to play in creating that very cultic memory with a different temple, they seem lukewarm about the prospect. Is the Senate vacillating about what it thinks of Imperial cult? If so, why?

One possible reason is the motivations of both Tiberius and the Asian ambassadors. Tacitus states that "Tiberius was frequently present in the Senate in order to dispel a rumor" (*Ann.* 4.55.1 *Caesar, quo famam averteret, adesse frequens senatui*), referring to reports that he was planning to have Agrippina killed (4.54.2). Instead of dispelling the rumor by responding directly to it

⁸⁷ For *rogare sententiam* as a technical phrase used to describe senatorial procedure, see *OLD* s.v. *rogo* 4; Woodcock 1959, 11.

⁸⁸ Aelius Aristides *Or.* 19.13. It is unclear whether this round figure of 400 is an accurate count or merely an estimate (Talbert 1984, 284).

⁸⁹ Talbert 1984, 149. ⁹⁰ Talbert 1984, 281.

⁹¹ For voting by *discessio*, see Talbert 1984, 202.

(say, by changing his treatment of her as a public show of solidarity), Tiberius opts for misdirection, and the Asian temple discussion is the red herring of choice.⁹² This recalls how Tiberius “granted the Senate the appearance of antiquity while confirming the strength of the principate for himself” during the asylum discussions (3.60.1 *vim principatus sibi firmans imaginem antiquitatis senatui praebebat*), where Tiberius hoped that allowing the Senate free rein to discuss a traditional-looking matter of cultic memory would make him look like a better leader and draw focus away from his involvement of the Senate in granting extraordinary honors to Drusus. Now, however, the thing Tiberius wishes to cover up (the alleged threat to Agrippina’s life) is actual malevolence, and this time the lack of senatorial enthusiasm suggests that the facade is less successful. Perhaps the senators, and the reader, are beginning to think that Tiberius promotes an interest in religious affairs only when trying to cover up some distasteful action.

The motivations of the Asian cities, which Tacitus says “competed with equal self-interest but different strengths” (*Ann.* 4.55.1 *certabant, pari ambitione, viribus diversae*), also seem to suggest that little has changed since the first asylum debate. There, too, there was a concern with *ambitio*, which the senators feared might pollute the observance of *religio* and which they did their best to constrain (*Ann.* 3.63.4).⁹³ The types of evidence the embassies submit also sound familiar, in that each city will trot out examples of its past benefactions to the Romans in support of its case. But whereas memory still plays a role, *cultic* memory does not take pride of place. The first discussion’s emphasis was on “ancient superstitions or their services to the Roman people” (3.60.2 *vetustis superstitionibus aut meritis in populum Romanum*),⁹⁴ but here it is “the ancientness of their race and their enthusiasm for the Roman people” (4.55.1 *de vetustate generis, studio in populum Romanum*) that the states highlight, not the ancientness of their religious traditions (however dismissive Tacitus may have been about them). It is particularly benefactions to the Romans in the past that now seem important: Smyrna, the ultimate winner, discusses only briefly its divine ancestry and then “move[s] on to the things in which they placed greatest trust: services rendered to the Roman people in the wars with Perseus, Aristonicus, and other kings” (4.56.1 *transcendere ad ea, quis maxime fidebant, in populum Romanum officiis per bella Persi et Aristonici aliorumque regum*). And as in the first asylum debate, the criteria for disqualification are inconsistent. Pergamum is refused because it already has a temple of Augustus, yet it is not problematic that Smyrna, whose bid for the temple of Tiberius was ultimately successful, was the first to establish a temple to Roma (4.56.1). Miletus is similarly denied because of its thriving shrine of Diana, but the Senate had refused its claim to the right of asylum,

⁹² Cf. Furneaux 1896, 553.

⁹³ See §3.4, pp. 158–9.

⁹⁴ See §3.4, p. 152, on the valence of *superstitionibus*.

as it did with the two cities that are now finalists (3.63.3); Miletus' cult was not important enough then, but is too important now. And similar issues do not disqualify Sardis and Smyrna. Indeed, the deciding factor in favor of Smyrna has nothing to do with cult at all; it is being reminded of the time when the Smyrnaeans literally gave the clothes off their backs to assist Rome (4.56.2) that seems to sway the Senate (as *ita*, 4.56.3, suggests: the vote in Smyrna's favor is presented as the direct consequence of the story of the clothes). Again, as with the debate about Diana Limnatis, cult practice or divine intervention features hardly at all. The Senate lacks enthusiasm for any decisions to do with emperor cult, but the Asian cities also seem to be aware of that lack of enthusiasm. Already the Senate's general abdication of any decision-making that requires an understanding of cultic memory has become apparent, but in the wake of the Spanish temple discussion it has become equally clear that emperor cult is not a matter for sincerity. When Tiberius refuses cult, senators complain; when decisions need to be made about a cult that he has accepted, they appear uninterested. The Senate's general incompetence in matters of religious memory combines with the political-power dynamics of Imperial cult, and the result is inconsistency and apathy.

It is amidst this senatorial discussion, and ostensibly in the service of emperor cult, that Tiberius makes the ultimately disastrous decision to leave Rome:

Inter quae diu meditato prolatoque saepius consilio tandem Caesar in Campaniam, specie dedicandi templa apud Capuam Iovi, apud Nolam Augusto, sed certus procul urbe degere. (*Ann.* 4.57.1)

(In the middle of these matters, according to a plan that he had been thinking of for a long time but more often put off, Caesar finally left for Campania, on the appearance of dedicating temples—one to Jupiter in Capua and one to Augustus in Nola—but determined to live far from the city.)

The timing forces the reader again to rethink Tiberius' motives for being present during the debate on the temple in Asia (4.55.1):⁹⁵ perhaps, in addition to diverting people's attention from his strife with Agrippina, he is also attempting to avert a second negative rumor that he predicts will be attached to his withdrawal. None of Tiberius' actions in these chapters therefore appear sincere, and that extends to the dedication of the temples to Augustus and Jupiter. So when Tiberius is responsible for the construction and dedication of temples for the *divus*, these acts of cultic commemoration are smokescreens for other political considerations. Tacitus suggests this when he identifies the dedication of the two temples as the *species* for Tiberius' withdrawal to Capri, whereas the true *causa* for the departure he goes on to identify

⁹⁵ Cf. Martin and Woodman 1989, 222.

(with reservations) as having something to do with Sejanus. This need not necessarily mean, of course, that Tiberius' apparent concern for the temples was insincere: the difference between *species* and *causa* might reflect the kind of causal overdetermination common in ancient historians' explanations of the reasons and motives behind events, something analogous to Thucydides' famous use of the terms αἴτιον and πρόφασις.⁹⁶ But Tacitus' *species* perhaps has a more sinister meaning than Thucydides' αἴτιον.⁹⁷ Tacitus most frequently uses *species* to indicate "appearance or pretext," to underline the wide gulf between appearance and reality that is so characteristic of Tacitus' view of the principate, and particularly the Tiberian principate.⁹⁸ This is a different situation from what Thucydides described. After all, while the αἰτίαι of Epidamnus and Corcyra that provided the proximate cause for the Peloponnesian War cannot really be said to be the fault of either Athens or Sparta, the *species* of temple dedication that cloaked Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome is much more under his own control.⁹⁹

So the reader is probably inclined to believe that *species* implies that Tiberius' concern for the temples of Augustus and Jupiter is pretense, a convenient way to whitewash his true reasons for leaving Rome behind.¹⁰⁰ This sits quite oddly against Tiberius' assertion during the Spanish temple speech that he wished to protect Augustus' honors (*Ann.* 4.37.3). Tiberius may say that he considers the divinity of Augustus very important, but the circumstances of his *actions* indicate hypocrisy: he is really less concerned with commemorating Augustus in cult than he is with how that cult can be useful to him in hiding the more unsavory aspects of his rule in a cloak of piety. Furthermore, the link Tacitus draws between the temple of Augustus at Nola and the activities of Sejanus (cf. 4.57.1 *ad Seiani artes*), who in Tiberius' absence will be responsible for some terrible atrocities, hints at how Tiberius' pretense of devotion to *divus Augustus* can have a real and negative impact on Roman society. Furthermore, using a temple to his predecessor as a pretext

⁹⁶ Thuc. 1.23.6, with Rawlings 1975, chs. 3–4; Heath 1986. For another example of a Latin historian nodding to Thucydides' vocabulary of causation, see Sall. *Hist.* 4.69.5 with Scanlon 1980, 173–4. For similar instances of dual motivation in Tacitus, cf. *Ann.* 2.59.1, with §2.5, pp. 106–7; *Ann.* 3.31.2, with Shotton 1989, 188.

⁹⁷ The closest parallel in Latin literature for a combination of *species/causa* used to indicate a similar opposition between a true and an alleged cause is Ampelius 40.3, where the Senate's denial of a consulship to Caesar is described as "the alleged rather than the true cause" (*species magis quam causa*) of the civil war with Pompey.

⁹⁸ Pearcy 1974, 21–48; he does not discuss this passage. Cf. Gerber and Greef 1903, 1532; Valenti Pagnini 1987, 90.

⁹⁹ I owe this point to Chris Pelling, *per litteras*.

¹⁰⁰ Suetonius' account makes this even clearer, saying that he "alleged" the temple dedication "as the cause of his departure" (*Tib.* 40 *quam causam profectionis praetenderat*).

makes Tiberius' withdrawal sit ironically against his previous statement that he had never wished for Augustus' deification to "be turned to the destruction of citizens" (1.73.3 *in perniciem civium . . . verteretur*), for the emperor's withdrawal allows Sejanus to perpetrate exactly that kind of destruction.¹⁰¹ Here the lip service that has been paid to cultic commemoration of *divus Augustus* is finally revealed as such.

If the Spanish temple debate made it clear that many of Tiberius' subjects now consider cultic commemoration a crucial (or even mandatory) part of the honors to be paid to an emperor, living or deceased, the events that have followed that debate show that this interest in cultic memory is often merely superficial. The Senate in particular is marked by growing inconsistency, bordering on incompetence, in dealing with questions relating to ritual. When it comes to religious decision-making unrelated to the Imperial cult, the Senate lacks even the *libertas* of the temple asylum discussions in *Annals* 3 and has certainly not regained its capability for the kind of sifting and sorting of historical precedents that is necessary to decide cases like the dispute between Sparta and Messene. And whereas senators secretly complained about Tiberius' rejection of cultic commemoration in the Spanish temple episode, when it comes to making decisions about the Asian temple of Tiberius, a site where he *will* be ritually commemorated, they are strangely passive and unenthusiastic. For Tiberius' part, his ritual acts performed for the *divus* (sacrifices, temple foundations) do not suggest he truly values the worship of the new god as much as he values the political capital to be gained from those ritual acts, particularly as a tool of misdirection to cover up the more unsavory aspects of his principate. This does not, of course, necessarily mean that Tiberius was being disingenuous when he refused the Spanish temple, since Tacitus makes it clear that this was part of a lifelong policy of refusing cult (*Ann.* 4.38.3); yet it is significant that Tacitus uses Tiberius' subsequent acts of worship for *divus Augustus* to illustrate the emperor's worst qualities. This complex interweaving of events (Tiberius' refusal to be worshipped in his own lifetime, followed by a discussion of a temple in a different province where he *will* be worshipped; a senate which clamors for cultic commemoration but seems strangely incapable of actually making decisions about religious memory; Tiberius' professed enthusiasm for *divus Augustus*' honors, which in practice serves more as a smokescreen for his own hostilities and deficiencies) sets the stage for Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome by showing the reader how far attitudes to cultic matters have shifted since the beginning of the *Annals*. Rome's religious landscape is now characterized above all by hypocrisy, indifference, and incompetence.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Davies 2004, 195.

4.6 WITHDRAWAL, DISASTER, AND THE PERVERSION OF RITUAL

Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome, an important watershed in the Tiberian hexad, heralds a shift in the kinds of emphasis Tacitus gives to religious material. While deification and cultic honors for members of the Imperial family, and the concomitant tendency toward incompetence and flattery in the Senate, remain prominent in Tacitus' narrative, he now adds another thread to the tapestry: questions about fate and about the interpretation of events as signs and portents. This aspect of the narrative is not quite new, for we saw similar questions raised in Tacitus' account of the Tiber flood early in Tiberius' reign (*Ann.* 1.76.1, 78.3–4) and in his musings on *fortuna*'s role in Claudius' unexpected rise to power (3.18.4).¹⁰² But these strands are now woven together in an important way. Combining the same old problems in religious memory with a sustained focus on fate, dynasty, and astrology highlights the relationship between them: there is a close connection between Tiberius' failure to ensure the longevity of Rome's religious traditions and Tacitus' dark view of how bad the principate is for Roman society.

Astrology comes to the fore when predictions about Tiberius' departure give Tacitus the chance to reflect on the art's practitioners and their shortcomings:

ferebant periti caelestium iis motibus siderum excessisse Roma Tiberium, ut reditus illi negaretur, unde exitii causa multis fuit, properum finem vitae coniectantibus vulgantibusque; neque enim tam incredibilem casum providebant, ut undecim per annos libens patria careret. mox patuit breve confinium artis et falsi, veraque quam obscuris tegerentur. nam in urbem non regressurum haud forte dictum: ceterorum nescii egere, cum propinquo rure aut litore et saepe moenia urbis adsidens extremam senectam compleverit. (*Ann.* 4.58.2–3)

(Those skilled in celestial matters said that Tiberius had left Rome under motions of the stars of a kind that would deny him a return; this was a cause of destruction for many who conjectured and broadcast a swift end of the emperor's life. For they did not foresee such an incredible misfortune that he would gladly be absent from his country for eleven years. Soon the fine line between skill and error was revealed, and also the obscurity in which the truth can be hidden. For it was no accident that it was said that he would not return to the city: but they spoke in ignorance of everything else, since he lived out the end of his old age in the countryside nearby or on the coast, and often sitting outside the walls of the city.)

Importantly, astrology's validity as a predictive practice is not up for debate: Tacitus emphasizes that the prediction that Tiberius would not return to Rome in fact turned out to be true. It is not the science of astrology Tacitus criticizes,

¹⁰² On the passages, see §1.1, pp. 25–9, and §3.2, pp. 137–40.

but its practitioners (or those who made foolish interpretations based on their predictions);¹⁰³ *coniectantibus vulgantibusque* puts the emphasis on the interpretation and dissemination of the horoscope, not on the mechanics of its casting. The problem lies in the fact that astrology leads people to jump to conclusions about what Tiberius' failure to return to Rome actually signifies. They assume it will mean he has died (and accordingly are executed for predicting the *princeps*' death), since they did not consider it possible that he would remain alive but gladly (*libens*) stay in exile.¹⁰⁴ The problem, then, is not that fate is impossible to predict using the stars, but that it is difficult to understand the predictions the stars allow you to make. How right (and wrong) the astrologers' predictions were only became visible later (*mox*), when Tiberius came so close to returning.¹⁰⁵ The stars, then, give correct information, but they do not say everything, and other factors remain unknown (*ceterorum nescii egere*) until after the fact. An inability to know Tiberius' mind is closely linked with an inability to interpret the stars. With this passage, then, Tacitus invites the reader to think about the upcoming end of Tiberius' reign, while also underlining the difficulties people at the time had in understanding that it was coming and what form it would take.

There are similar issues surrounding the interpretation of signs in Tacitus' account of the incidents opening the narrative of AD 27, the first full year of Tiberius' absence from the city: the deadly collapse of a shoddily built amphitheater at Fidenae, an "unforeseen evil" (*Ann.* 4.62.1 *malum improvisum*), and a massive fire on the Caelian Hill in Rome (4.64.1), both interpreted as prodigies:

feralemque annum ferebant et omnibus adversis susceptum principi consilium absentiae, qui mos vulgo, fortuita ad culpam trahentes, ni Caesar obviam isset tribuendo pecunias ex modo detrimenti. (4.64.1)

(People said that it was a deadly year, and that the *princeps* had undertaken his plan of absence with adverse omens—attributing fortuitous events to fault, as is the mob's custom—but Caesar confronted this talk by donating money in proportion to the damages.)

The *vulgus* sees Tiberius' departure as the cause of these two disasters, in a way that Tacitus implies is uncritical. With characteristic fickleness, they are easily convinced to ignore this interpretation when Tiberius throws money

¹⁰³ Woodman 2016, 183 notes the ambiguity of *multis*: is Tacitus speaking here of astrologers, or "those who based their own misguided predictions on the astrologers' pronouncements?"

¹⁰⁴ Koestermann 1965, 180; Woodman 1972, 155; Houston 1985, 192; Davies 2004, 166; Edwards 2011, 1050. On punishments for predicting the emperor's death using astrology, see Barton 1994a, 42–3, 47–8.

¹⁰⁵ Woodman and Martin 1996, 226. Shotter 1989, 191 lists Tiberius' journeys back to the mainland.

at the problem.¹⁰⁶ This suggests that the *vulgus*, like the *multi* of *Ann.* 4.58, is primed to see disaster everywhere, but quick to abandon their fear when the emperor does something to benefit them. Ironically, Tiberius *can* be seen as the cause of the collapse of the amphitheater (if not of the fire), but not in the way that the *vulgus* thinks: one factor contributing to the amphitheater's collapse, in addition to its hasty and careless construction, is the larger-than-anticipated influx of spectators who have been starved for theatrical spectacles under the austerity that characterizes Tiberius' regime (*Ann.* 4.62.2). Tacitus is able to cast implicit doubt on the *vulgus*' assumption that the collapse and the fire are signs that the gods are angry because Tiberius has left Rome, without explicitly saying that there is nothing to that interpretation. Indeed, since the reader has been told that the gods are angry at Rome (4.1.2), those who would view these disasters as signs of divine displeasure might even have Tacitus' support. The two disasters thus add to the atmosphere of gathering gloom and approaching fate that attends Tiberius' withdrawal to Capri—much as the storm clouds that prevented Germanicus from landing at Samothrace (*Ann.* 2.54.2) gave the impression, without explicitly stating it, that angry gods were foreshadowing his death.

The reaction to the fire shows that *adulatio* is alive and well in the Senate:¹⁰⁷

adduntur sententiae ut mons Caelius in posterum Augustus appellaretur, quando cunctis circum flagrantibus sola Tiberii effigies sita in domo Iunii senatoris inviolata mansisset. evenisse id olim Claudia Quintae eiusque statuam vim ignium bis elapsam maiores apud aedem matris deum consecravisse. sanctos acceptosque numinibus Claudios et augendam caerimoniam loco in quo tantum in principem honorem di ostenderint. (*Ann.* 4.64.3)

(In addition, there were resolutions that the Caelian Hill should thereafter be called the “Augustan,” since when everything around it was burning, only an image of Tiberius located in the house of the senator Junius had remained unharmed. The same thing, they noted, had once happened to Claudia Quinta, and the ancestors had consecrated her statue, which had twice escaped the violence of fire, in the temple of the Mother of the Gods. The Claudians had been sanctified and accepted by the divinities, and they ought to enhance the sanctity of the place where the gods had shown such honor to the *princeps*.)

Tacitus describes the hill's renaming using a ritual word (*caerimonia*);¹⁰⁸ this, combined with the fixation on a statue (*effigies*; cf. *Ann.* 4.37.2), indicate the Senate is acting in contravention of everything Tiberius said in his speech

¹⁰⁶ The *vulgus* in the *Annals* can indicate public opinion (Newbold 1976, 88); Tacitus emphasizes its “fickleness, turbulence, gullibility” (see further Newbold 1976, 86–7). On Tiberius and the money, see Davies 2004, 163. Koestermann 1965, 192 is more positive about Tiberius' motives.

¹⁰⁷ Presumably the *sententiae* of 4.64.3 are senatorial, since the statue in question was in the house of a senator Junius (otherwise unknown; Shotter 1989, 194 has some speculations).

¹⁰⁸ For its connotations, see Ch. 2, n. 69 and n. 81, and §3.3, p. 143.

refusing worship at the Spanish temple. The senators claim they are using tradition as a guide for their proposal, finding precedent in honors the *maiores* once granted to Claudia Quinta. She is perhaps a surprising comparandum for Tiberius. Both have a reputation for lacking chastity, a rumor that in Claudia Quinta's case was proved manifestly false by her central role in the ritual induction of Magna Mater into the city and pantheon of Rome.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the senators' fulsome praise of the Claudian *gens* sits uneasily against Tacitus' observation early in the *Annals* that its defining characteristic is *superbia* (1.4.3).¹¹⁰ Even more importantly, the rest of the *Annals* will in fact show clearly that the Claudian *gens* will not ultimately be favored by the gods, who will become increasingly, and increasingly obviously, displeased with the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Therefore, linked with the Senate's unwillingness to abandon worshipful attitudes to the *princeps* is an insufficiently critical attitude to occurrences that appear to show divine wrath or favor. The gods' wrath, Tacitus has indicated (*Ann.* 4.1.2), is related to Tiberius' savageries; to the reader, this makes any positive interpretation of the survival of Tiberius' statue a false one, and any attempt to inscribe that misreading on to Rome's cultic-memorial landscape a very ill-advised one.

The senators' return to veneration of Tiberius after the fire heralds a new and increasingly problematic turn toward the treatment of not only the emperor himself, but also Sejanus, as gods. This persistent undercurrent throughout *Annals* 4 reveals its deadly consequences during the entrapment, trial, and death of Titius Sabinus in AD 28. The episode is a literary showpiece, vivid and masterfully told, capturing the reader's attention as the book closes, reiterating the motifs of *saevitia* and *deum ira* with which it began, and highlighting its religious aspects.¹¹¹ Tacitus ominously opens his narrative of the "horrible beginning of the year" (*Ann.* 4.68.1 *foedum anni principium*); *foedus* frequently describes prodigious occurrences,¹¹² priming the reader to expect something disastrous. From a ritual perspective, this is not exactly a normal year-beginning, for Tiberius is not present in person at the customary annual sacrifices on the Capitoline that mark the start of the year.¹¹³ Instead, he is "present" only by sending a letter: "But Caesar, after using a letter to pray the solemnities of the beginning year on 1 January, turned to Sabinus" (*Ann.* 4.70.1 *sed Caesar sollemnia incipientis anni kalendis Ianuariis epistula precatus, vertit in Sabinum*). This is a "distortion, because couched in a letter,"

¹⁰⁹ On Claudia Quinta, see Livy 29.14.12; Ovid *Fast.* 4.307; Pliny *HN* 7.120. When her statue twice escaped destruction by fire (in 111 BC and AD 3; Val. Max. 1.8.11), it was embedded in cultic memory; she may even have been worshipped as a goddess after her death (Koestermann 1965, 193; *CIL* 6.492–94). For Tiberius' unbridled lusts cf. *Ann.* 4.57.1, 6.1.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Suet. *Tib.* 2.1, 2.3.

¹¹¹ Walker 1952, 105; Blaensdorf 1994, 771–4; Corrigan 1993, 333–4 and 341.

¹¹² Cf. *OLD* s.v. *foedus* 2b; *Hist.* 1.18.1 (also near the beginning of the year); *Ann.* 16.13.1.

¹¹³ On the sacrifices, see Weinstock 1971, 217–19; Scullard 1981, 52–4.

of these vitally important sacrifices, for which Tiberius should be physically present.¹¹⁴ Not only the legal, but also the religious, landscape of Rome has changed in the absence of the emperor to lead its vital rites.

Yet Sabinus himself, the victim of Tiberius and Sejanus, sees and tries to reveal the ritual perversions for which the emperor is responsible by framing his death as a twisted sacrifice: “He was condemned and dragged off, shouting (as much as he could with his garment pulled up over his head and his throat tightly bound) that this was the way the year was beginning, these were the sort of victims that were being slaughtered for Sejanus” (*Ann.* 4.70.1 *trahebatur damnatus, quantum obducta veste et adstrictis faucibus niti poterat, clamitans sic inchoari annum, has Seiano victimas cadere*). Sabinus sees himself as a sacrifice to appease Sejanus, who is likened to an angry god. This recalls the imagery of *Ann.* 4.1.1 and the worship of Sejanus’ statues (*Ann.* 4.2.3); according to Sabinus, his sacrifice-like execution represents the logical conclusion of that impulse to venerate Sejanus.¹¹⁵ This becomes even more problematic if we consider the god to which Sejanus is being likened. Tacitus could be comparing him to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, who was included in the consuls’ sacrifice.¹¹⁶ Other commentators emphasize the importance of Janus, another recipient of the consuls’ sacrifices at the beginning of the year¹¹⁷ and see a pun on Sejanus’ name (“un-Janus”), an “appropriate patron deity of the malign and corrupt regime which Tacitus is chronicling, one that looks like the traditional system but is in fact its negation.”¹¹⁸ There is a general Greco-Roman horror of human sacrifice, but Janus in particular normally received bloodless offerings, so sacrificing a person to him is doubly horrible; and sacrificial victims must come willingly to the altar, so it is a particularly bad omen that Sabinus must be dragged off kicking and screaming.¹¹⁹ This is about as perverted as a sacrifice could be.

In the unfolding of this horrible scene, describing the reactions of onlookers gives Tacitus an opportunity to analyze the permeation of these twisted religious ideals into the rest of society.

quem enim diem vacuum poena, ubi inter sacra et vota, quo tempore verbis etiam profanis abstinere mos esset, vincla et laqueus inducantur? non <im>prudenter Tiberium tantam invidiam adisse: quaesitum meditatūque, ne quid impedire credatur, quo minus novi magistratus, quo modo delubra et altaria, sic carcerem recludant. (*Ann.* 4.70.2–3)

(What day could be free of punishment, when in the middle of rites and vows—a time when the custom was to refrain even from profane words—chains and a noose were brought in? Tiberius, they thought, had not incurred this hatred

¹¹⁴ Morgan 1998, 585. On Tiberius’ letters, see Morello 2006.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Martin and Woodman 1989, 90, 252; Shotter 1989, 199.

¹¹⁶ Martin and Woodman 1989, 252.

¹¹⁷ See Feeney 2007, 168 and 286 n. 10.

¹¹⁸ Corrigan 1993, 339; Morgan 1998, 587.

¹¹⁹ Corrigan 1993, 339.

unintentionally; he had sought it out and thought about it, lest it should be believed that there was anything preventing new magistrates from opening the prison in the same way that they opened the shrines and the altars.)

On the one hand, these critics are more religiously aware than Tiberius and Sejanus: they understand that Sabinus' execution represents a perversion of traditional year-beginning rituals and recognize its horror and sacrilege as well as the dire implications it could have for the future. The critics dutifully show themselves to be aware of sacrificial customs/norms (*mos*), particularly the notion of ritual silence necessary to maintain the gods' favor during a sacrifice;¹²⁰ Tiberius and Sejanus are so far from maintaining that ritual silence on 1 January that citizens are taken prisoner and killed in the midst of important rites. Yet despite the correctness of these criticisms, no one intervened to stop the problematic events: as Sabinus is dragged off, he meets only empty streets and eerie silence (4.70.2 *fuga vastitas, deseri itinera fora*). Ritual silence is sinister when it is maintained during an arrest. Interrupting sacrifices was a serious offense,¹²¹ but since the victim here was human, this probably is a sacrifice someone *ought* to have stopped. And the reason no one intervenes is fear, a fear they are afraid to disclose (4.70.2 *paventes*). This picture of fear that distorts, because it prevents honest opinions from being expressed, recalls Tiberius' accession to the throne, when the senators feared the implication of Tiberius' refusal of the principate (or were afraid to let him know they had understood it) and responded with flattery and prayers.¹²² Once again, fear is connected with disingenuousness and a perversion of the cultic traditions that form the backbone of Rome's religious memory.

Yet the people are also misguided in placing all the blame on Tiberius. While his absence from Rome and its traditional rites is certainly culpable, it does not follow that he deliberately aimed to equate prison and altar by plotting such killings. Much like the senators in the debate on the Spanish temple, these people are critical of a new perversion of cultic memory, but are culpable in not actually doing anything about it. The critics' biggest misunderstanding, however, is that they have also completely taken Sejanus out of the equation, although he, not Tiberius, was primarily instrumental in Sabinus' downfall (*Ann.* 4.68.2).¹²³ This reflects what Tacitus has been implying all along: if Sejanus' destructive rise to prominence happened because the gods were angry at Rome (*Ann.* 4.1.2), perhaps Romans at the time were fated

¹²⁰ Corrigan 1993, 335–7 notes that words of good omen were especially important on 1 January, and would serve as a “general omen” for the rest of the year.

¹²¹ Cohee 1994; see §2.6, p. 115 on Piso, and references there cited.

¹²² See §1.2. On fear as characteristic of states ruled by tyrants, see Martin and Woodman 1989, 253.

¹²³ Davies 2004, 194.

not to see it. They can see that Rome's religious traditions are being ignored and perverted, but they cannot see how or why.

The execution of Sabinus is followed by an even more worrying act, this time from the Senate, of outright worship not only of Tiberius, but of Sejanus as well:

pavor internus occupaverat animos, cui remedium adulatione quaerebatur. ita, quamquam diversis super rebus consulerentur, aram clementiae, aram amicitiae effigiesque circum Caesaris ac Seiani censuere; crebrisque precibus efflagitabant visendi sui copiam facerent. (*Ann.* 4.74.1–2)

(Internal fear had occupied their minds, for which a remedy was sought in flattery. And so, although they were consulted on different matters, they proposed an altar of Clemency, an altar of Friendship, and statues of Caesar and Sejanus around them. And with frequent prayers they demanded that they grant an opportunity of seeing them.)

This set of proposals shows how the creeping rhetoric of deification and worshipful treatment of the emperor and his associates has blossomed: not only is Sejanus now viewed almost as divine, but in Rome, Tiberius is increasingly being treated as a god of the state cult. In Sejanus' case, his treatment as a god was previously confined to popular settings and the armies on the fringes of the empire (cf. *Ann.* 4.2.3); that a statue of Sejanus beside an altar is now being proposed in Rome itself suggests that this godlike treatment is now creeping into the capital. The same is true of Tiberius. He has begun to be worshipped in a temple in Asia, but now for the first time the Senate has given him an *effigies* in Rome, of the type he explicitly refused when a temple was proposed in Spain (cf. *Ann.* 4.38.2); what Tiberius would not allow to happen in every province is now happening in the capital. The altars themselves also represent an escalation, in that they are even more worrying than previous altars, such as the *ara adoptionis* decreed for Livia (*Ann.* 1.14.2) and the *ara ultionis* commemorating Piso's demise (3.18.2).¹²⁴ Given the grotesque human sacrifice that has just taken place "at the hands of a very unfriendly Sejanus and a very unmerciful Tiberius,"¹²⁵ for the Senate to invoke *Clementia* and *Amicitia* now is the worst kind of doublespeak. Presumably these altars are intended as the sites of sacrifices in the future; every time a priest performs such a rite, they will be surrounded by images of Tiberius and Sejanus. Thus we are dealing not only with the problematic inscription of both Tiberius and Sejanus into cultic memory in Rome itself, but also with a twisted kind of

¹²⁴ Furneaux 1896, 576; Koestermann 1965, 215–16. Furneaux 1896, 577 thinks statues surround only the altar of *Amicitia*; yet in the Latin the altars are too closely grouped together for so fine a distinction. Altars in pairs or groups are common in Roman religion, e.g. the group of thirteen archaic altars at Lavinium. *Clementia* received public cult in Rome under Julius Caesar (Clark 2007, 11, 160, 247–9, 291).

¹²⁵ Corrigan 1993, 340.

euphemism that covers up the two men's worst qualities by commemorating the personified *opposites* of those qualities in cult. And the perversion of ritual does not stop there: the Senate begs for a chance to see Tiberius and Sejanus in what amounts to cletic prayers, in which the two "deities" are summoned to appear to their worshippers in an epiphany.¹²⁶ Tiberius' famous withdrawal from Rome has driven the Senate to pray to him to leave Capri and come back to Rome; that language is worrying enough, but it is even more problematic that Sejanus has been assimilated into their prayers. As *Annals* 4 draws to a close, we are in new territory. Despite Tiberius' outright refusal of temples, the Senate continue to make him a god; despite Sejanus' manifest perversion of religious traditions by calling for the "sacrifice" of Sabinus, the Senate elevates him to the same level. So thoroughly does the power of savage men (cf. *Ann.* 4.1.1) corrupt traditional cult.

4.7 CONCLUSIONS

In *Annals* 4, Tacitus has gradually woven together a picture of the Tiberian principate from the threads he has spun in *Annals* 1–3: the growing tendency to flatter the Imperial family and to worship the living emperor; a diminishing reverence for the ancientness of Rome's important religious traditions; Tiberius' complex relationship with his deified predecessor Augustus and the cultic precedents he established in life; the Senate's increasing ineffectiveness in shaping cultic memory; and increasing savagery toward Roman citizens. The reader was told at the beginning of the book that, thanks to the wrath of the gods, Sejanus would begin to make things worse for Rome, and that has been borne out by the narrative. When Titus Sabinus frames his own death as a sacrifice to Sejanus, he is getting at one of the powerful truths that has been revealed to us *Annals* 4: beyond the *saevitia* that makes this the bloodiest epoch of Tiberius' rule, Sejanus' presence in Tiberius' inner circle has an immediate, and increasingly negative, effect on Roman religion. It is little wonder that this has happened. We have seen a constant tendency for the cult of the deified emperors to spill over into the worship of the living emperor, then members of the Imperial family, and now anyone closely connected with the emperor. This is something Tiberius has never done enough to stop.

Yet it is still impossible to tell what either Tiberius or the Senate thinks of emperor worship. Imperial cult and its related vocabulary of cultic honors are

¹²⁶ Cairns 1971, 444–5 (on Hor. *Carm.* 1.30, a literary example of such a prayer); Martin and Woodman 1989, 260; Furley and Bremer 2001, 61. The term "cletic hymn" goes back to Menander Rhetor *On the Division of Epideictic Speeches*, 334.25–336.4. On the hymnic topos of summoning a god's presence, see also Furley and Bremer 2001, 54–5.

a convenient vehicle for *adulatio*, and a useful tactic of misdirection and good publicity when the populace needs to be distracted, but it looks increasingly as though concern with it has become formulaic and insincere. When it comes to actually performing acts of cult (the dedication of a temple for Augustus by Tiberius, or of Tiberius by the Senate), people balk. Even as this new form of commemoration has become so indispensable that Tiberius' critics cannot imagine him going without it, a certain apathy has also set in. Given the possibility that emperor cult is part of what has set off the gods' anger, this all seems particularly futile: the Romans have risked much in the service of this new avenue of cultic memory, which they now seem to recognize increasingly as politically motivated and impotent to actually ensure anyone's posthumous reputation.

Significantly, there is no sign that the divine wrath Tacitus pointed out at the beginning of the book shows any signs of abating, or has even been recognized by his characters. When attempting to read signs, people can only get it wrong; the gods have not sent any clear signals to Tiberian Rome that things are amiss, and there is no chance to recognize and fix the problem. And since all of the trends that have led Rome to this pass are, if anything, getting worse rather than better, we anticipate only further decline as the hexad hurtles toward its conclusion.

Fate, Astrology, and the End of Life

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In his now-fragmentary account of the period following Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome, Tacitus focuses largely on questions of fate, astrology, and the interpretation of divine signs that enrich his examination of issues already identified earlier in the *Annals* (prosecutions of Roman citizens, cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family, and Augustus' extraordinarily prominent role in cult-related decision-making). In his account of the deaths and commemorations of Livia and Sejanus, Tacitus explores again the cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family, and also how cult can commemorate the punishment of those accused of criminal activity. But now, in the aftermath of *Annals* 4.1 and the paradigm of divine punishment for wrongdoing that it has imposed on the narrative, these by now familiar problems take on a special, and dark, significance. In *Annals* 6, Tacitus also invites the reader to revisit the issue of the Sibylline books from *Annals* 1; served up here alongside Tacitus' reports of Tiberius' affinity for astrology, the demise of the traditional Roman means of understanding the gods' will is suddenly and effectively juxtaposed with the idea that the emperor himself has a special connection to providence. As Tiberius' reign hurtles to a close, the combination of familiar cultic memory problems with a new focus on astrology and fate, especially as related to dynastic concerns, highlights the relationship between the two: there is a real connection between the religious errors of Tiberius and his contemporaries and Tacitus' dark view of the principate's deleterious effects on Roman cultural memory.

5.2 COMMEMORATING LIVIA

Rome appears to have reached a new low of irreligious behavior, and when Livia dies shortly after the events involving Sabinus, Tacitus uses her death to remind the reader of the notion of divine punishment with which *Annals* 4

began, this time closely connecting it with questions of cultic commemoration. Her funeral, like the sacrifice-execution of Sabinus, is also situated at a year-beginning, and again Tiberius is absent (although filial *pietas* would have demanded that he attend his mother's funerary rites).¹ Once again, the Senate seems to assume (wrongly, as it turns out) that Tiberius would like her commemorated with cultic honors: "Ostensibly out of modesty, he also diminished the copious honors decreed by the Senate, retaining just a few and adding that heavenly rites should not be decreed; such, he said, had been her own preference" (*Ann.* 5.2.1 *honoresque memoriae eius ab senatu large decretos quasi per modestiam imminuit, paucis admodum receptis et addito, ne caelestis religio decerneretur: sic ipsam maluisse*). Tacitus raises questions about the motivations of everyone involved. Tiberius may merely be pretending that *modestia* is his reason for a refusal actually predicated on envy of his mother, and Tacitus' preceding narrative of their tense relationship suggests that is a very plausible interpretation of his actions.² It is unclear exactly how well Tiberius knew his mother's intentions, either in death or in life. When asked whether mockery of Livia was a punishable offense in the trial of Appuleia Varilla, Tiberius refused to answer until the next day (*Ann.* 2.50.2), presumably to have time to ascertain his mother's intentions.³ That display of weakness makes one wonder how much authority Tiberius has to reveal his mother's thoughts now: since she is dead, he can no longer go ask her opinion of deification, but would he have remembered to do so while she was alive? He did not consult her about the Asian temple, after all. So he could be making all of this up, but not necessarily; *quasi* gives "the ostensible or supposed reason for an action, whether true or false,"⁴ so the phrase could also indicate how the Senate interpreted what was genuinely driven by *modestia* on Tiberius' part. The careful dance of Senate and emperor that began in *Annals* 1 continues: is Tiberius legitimately acting to correct senatorial flattery, or merely playing the role that is expected of him?

But it is also not entirely clear that the Senate is motivated simply by *adulatio*: if the senators are operating based on hints they received during Livia's lifetime, divine honors would certainly not be unexpected. The phrase *caelestis religio* recalls the *templum et caelestes religiones* (*Ann.* 1.10.8) that were decreed for Augustus upon his death; if the senators were following the pattern of Augustus (who according to his detractors, at least, had wished for *templa* during his own life, 1.10.6), they might well have assumed that in

¹ Koestermann 1965, 221. Cf. Tiberius and Livia's absence from Germanicus' funeral (*Ann.* 3.3.1).

² So Woodman 2016, 57. Cf. also Tiberius' behavior when the honors for Germanicus are discussed (*Ann.* 3.2.3; see §3.2, p. 128).

³ On the incident, see §1.3, pp. 44–5.

⁴ OLD s.v. *quasi* 5a. Cf. the use of *quasi* in Suetonius' description of Livia's opposition to deification (*Tib.* 51.2).

Livia's case the *templum* that commemorated her in Asia (4.15.3) should also be followed by *caelestes religiones* in Rome once she was dead.⁵ Unlike other members of the Imperial family, and even Sejanus, Livia cannot be posthumously commemorated in cult, but the Senate cannot be totally blamed for failing to understand this apparent inconsistency.

Tiberius' pronouncement does not stop members of the public from debating her divinity, even three years after her death.⁶ Cotta Messalinus is indicted for various infelicitous anecdotes involving the Imperial family, including the fact that he had called Livia's birthday, although celebrated by priests, nothing more than a funeral banquet (*Ann.* 6.5.1 *cum die natali Augustae inter sacerdotes epularetur, novendialem eam cenam dixisse*).⁷ The remark's caustic wit hangs on the ambiguities that attach to the commemoration of deceased members of the Imperial house. Livia has been in some manner inscribed into Rome's cultic memory, since priests are commemorating her birthday as part of their ritual calendar; but because Tiberius has forbidden her deification, it is only as a dead mortal (a category decidedly inferior to that of "goddess") that she can be commemorated.⁸ It is unclear whether Tiberius (for blocking Livia's deification) or Livia herself (for failing to deserve it) is the target of Messalinus' criticism. It is interpreted as a criticism of the Imperial family, in any case (grouped together as it is with aspersions cast on Caligula's manhood and Messalinus' demeaning description of the emperor as "my little Tiberius," *Tiberiolus meus*), and seized upon by *delatores*. It is also relevant that Messalinus was attending the banquet in question in his role as a priest: he had held the augurate since at least AD 20.⁹ If we recall that Tiberius had erroneously involved the augurs in a set of games offered in thanksgiving for Livia's recovery from illness (*Ann.* 3.64.3), it is possible to see Messalinus' criticism as an act of resistance by a member of a priesthood unwillingly co-opted into the cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family.¹⁰ But Messalinus' accusers do not acknowledge his priestly authority; instead, they put him on trial for pointing out inconsistencies in how members of the Imperial family are commemorated.

⁵ Cf. Barrett 2002, 219. Claudius would eventually deify her in AD 42; her cult persisted until the end of the second century (Barrett 2002, 224), so would still have been active in Tacitus' lifetime.

⁶ Barrett 2002, 219–20 notes that in historical reality, the decision not to deify Livia probably was unpopular.

⁷ For the adjective *novendialis*, cf. Hor. *Epist.* 17.49 with Porphyrio *ad loc.*, Serv. *Aen.* 5.64; as a substantive, Petron. 65.20; Bragantini 1991, 220–1.

⁸ Martin 2001, 117. Cf. Koestermann 1965, 248–9; Woodman 2004, 168 n. 24. Woodman 2016, 108, however, notes that Cotta's joke may actually have occurred before Livia's death; if so, it should be interpreted as a complaint about the poor quality of the food at Livia's birthday celebration.

⁹ Rüpke 2008, 560.

¹⁰ See §3.5, pp. 160–3. Cf. also the similar act of resistance by another augur, Lentulus, to Maluginensis' rule-breaking request for a province (*Ann.* 3.59.1; §3.3, p. 147).

Tiberius intervenes to defend Messalinus by writing a letter on his behalf, and here Tacitus adds a new and unexpected layer to what is otherwise familiar ground. The emperor's defense sounds by now almost conventional, but it has a new and sinister meaning in Messalinus' particular case: the emperor "demanded that neither words wickedly twisted nor the guilelessness¹¹ of stories told at dinner parties should be considered a crime" (*Ann.* 6.5.2 *ne verba prave detorta neu convivalium fabularum simplicitas in crimen ducetur postulavit*). Tiberius' defense of Messalinus' jokes recalls his refusal to consider a broken oath to Augustus as grounds for conviction during the outbreak of *maiestas* trials (1.73.4). But unlike the otherwise unknown equestrian Rubrius who took Augustus' name in vain, Messalinus has a very dark backstory. He is notorious for his role in the Senate after the condemnations of Libo Drusus and Piso (2.32.1, 3.18.4) and has a reputation for excessive proposals designed to curry favor with the emperor.¹² Tacitus describes him as "the originator of all the most savage proposals" (6.5.1 *saevissimae cuiusque sententiae auctor*), reflecting his involvement in those earlier episodes, but also reminding us of the savage men to whom Tiberius lends his aid after the period when *fortuna* turns against Rome (4.1.1). By describing Messalinus as savage, Tacitus links him, and his off-color jokes about Livia, with the narrative of savage men, adverse fortune, and divine anger that began in AD 23. The savagery is only going to get worse. In the next chapter, in narrating the evils that befell Rome under the *delatores* who flourished at this time, Tacitus states that others would be duly condemned for jokes made at table: "They were accused for what they said in the Forum or at a dinner party, for whatever they spoke about" (6.7.3 *perinde in foro, in convivio, quaquam de re locuti incusabantur*). As Morello notes, this gives the lie to Tiberius' avowed lenience toward hostile table talk.¹³ Only the horrible Messalinus, because of his close friendship with the emperor, is spared. Just as Tacitus predicted, Tiberius protects the savage, and the incident is explicitly connected to the problem of deification.

Even more significant is the opening of Tiberius' letter, which Tacitus quotes directly. Tacitus' analysis of Tiberius' words again reminds us of the expectation of divine punishment set up at the beginning of *Annals* 4.

Insigne visum est earum Caesaris litterarum initium; nam his verbis exsorsus est: "quid scribam vobis, patres conscripti, aut quo modo scribam aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, di me deaque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio, si scio." adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant. neque frustra praestantissimus sapientiae firmare solitus est, si recludantur

¹¹ For the translation of *simplicitas*, see Woodman 2016, 110.

¹² Syme 1958, 323 n. 4; Barrett 2002, 219. See also his *atrox sententia* of *Ann.* 5.3.2.

¹³ Morello 2006, 349. Cf. also the entrapment of Sabinus (*Ann.* 4.68–9), on which see §4.6, pp. 205–9.

tyrannorum mentes, posse aspicì laniatus et ictus, quando ut corpora verberibus, ita saevitia, libidine, malis consultis animus dilaceretur. quippe Tiberium non fortuna, non solitudines protegebant quin tormenta pectoris suasque ipse poenas fateretur.

(*Ann.* 6.6)

(The opening of this letter of Caesar's is noteworthy, for he began with these words: "Conscript fathers, if I know what I should write to you at this time, or what I should not write at all, may the gods and goddesses destroy me worse than I feel myself daily being destroyed." That is the extent to which his deeds and crimes had turned into punishment for himself as well. It was not for nothing that the person who excelled most in wisdom was accustomed to affirm that if the minds of tyrants were opened up, you could see lacerations and blows, since the soul is torn apart by savagery, lust, and evil resolutions just as the body is torn apart by beatings. Indeed,¹⁴ neither fortune nor solitude protected Tiberius from confessing the torments of his breast and his own punishments.)

Scholars have long interpreted Tiberius' call for the gods and goddesses to destroy him as a sign of psychological distress, a plaintive cry from the emperor's guilty conscience.¹⁵ Tacitus connects this to the words of Socrates (for whom *praestantissimus sapientiae* is a periphrasis) about the effects of wickedness on tyrants' souls in Plato's *Gorgias* (524e–525a).¹⁶ But there is another way to understand Tiberius' statement: in terms of divine punishment. Tiberius' phrase *di me deaque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio* is carefully constructed, marked out by an alliteration highlighting the fact that *perire* is frequently construed in Latin as the passive of *perdere*.¹⁷ If *perire* is interpreted as a passive verb, it seems logical that the unspoken agents could be the same as the subjects of the active *perdere*—namely, the gods.¹⁸ If that is what Tiberius is trying to say—that he is being continually punished by the gods—that need not rule out the psychological interpretation. Madness, after all, can be a vehicle of divine punishment.¹⁹

By linking Tiberius' words to the passage of Plato (something which Suetonius, who quotes the same passage from Tiberius' letter, does *not*

¹⁴ For the translation, cf. Woodman 2016, 114.

¹⁵ See references cited by Woodman 2016, 111–12. Levick 1978a, 98–100 (followed by Morello 2006, 352 and Fulkerson 2013, 156) has interpreted the words as an indication that Tiberius' response to the attack on Messalinus is actually joking or ironic; I follow Woodman 2016, 111–12 in rejecting this explanation.

¹⁶ Furneaux 1896, 602; Syme 1958, 512; Dodds 1959, 379; Koestermann 1965, 251; Martin 2001, 118. See also Woodman 2016, 113 for other parallels. Woodman suggests *praestantissimus sapientiae* could also be a periphrasis for Plato.

¹⁷ Woodman 2016, 111, with examples there cited. Cf. Ellis 1889, 26; Martin 2001, 118.

¹⁸ For a similar omission cf. *Hist.* 1.3.2, where *nostram* is omitted with *ultionem* but supplied with *securitatem*; see §02, p. 17.

¹⁹ Cf. Herodotus' accounts of the madresses of Cambyzes (3.30.1) and Cleomenes (6.75) as punishments for transgressions against the gods; see Munson 1991, *passim*, esp. 51–3.

do),²⁰ Tacitus indicates that he has understood the emperor in this way. Socrates' observations in the *Gorgias* on the marks upon the souls of tyrants are placed in the context of divine punishment: the person who sees those marks is Rhadamanthus, described as the "judge" (δικαστής) of the dead who will punish those tyrants for their misdeeds in life. Rhadamanthus also plays this role in Virgil's *Aeneid* (6.566–9), where he forces the souls of the dead to confess (*fateri*) their sins, just as Tiberius confesses here (*fateretur*). Tacitus, however, assigns the role of confessor not to Rhadamanthus, but to *fortuna*. The word here may refer to Tiberius' Imperial rank,²¹ but it could also be meant to recall the *fortuna* of *Ann.* 4.1.1 who is turning Rome upside down. Supernatural forces allow nothing to remain peaceful, not even Tiberius' own mind.

Tacitus recalls the opening of *Annals* 4 in another way as well. In the passage of Plato that Tacitus paraphrases, the kinds of acts that leave scars upon tyrants' souls are "perjuries and injustice, . . . falsehood and pretension, . . . license, luxury, hybris, and incontinence" (*Gorgias* 525a ὑπὸ ἐπιπορκίων καὶ ἀδικίας . . . ψεύδους καὶ ἀλαζονείας . . . ἐξουσίας καὶ τρυφῆς καὶ ὕβρεως καὶ ἀκρατίας). Tacitus' causes are somewhat different: he sheds Plato's emphasis on falseness and nods to his mention of incontinence (ἀκρατίας ~ *libidine*, referring to Tiberius' notorious sexual proclivities)²² and bad conduct (*malis consultis* seems to refer to policy-making or conduct as a ruler and perhaps parallels Plato's ἀδικία and ἐξουσία). But the first type of bad behavior on Tacitus' list—missing from Plato's—is *saevitia*. This activates once again the connection to the *saevitia* shown by Tiberius and his ministers, above all Sejanus, that was associated with the gods' anger against the Romans in *Ann.* 4.1.1–2: one of the victims of that wrath appears to be Tiberius himself.

Furthermore, since these remarks come in the context of legal proceedings that include questions about deification, bringing up *saevitia* and divine punishment here allows Tacitus to make a powerful connection. The wording of Tiberius' prayer closely recalls his prayer during his speech refusing the temple in Spain (*Ann.* 4.38.3 *et deos et deas ipsas precor . . . ut mihi ad finem usque vitae quietam et intelligentem humani divinique iuris mentem duint*).²³ In the period since then, Tiberius has shown himself far from able to uphold human and divine law; many legal evils have been done, not least the execution of Titius Sabinus (4.68–70), and Tiberius' outburst could be read as one of irritation at having to repeatedly restrain the Senate and the informers in

²⁰ *Tib.* 67.1. For Suetonius, the passage is divorced from its context in the Messalinus episode and taken as an example of Tiberius' concern for his own reputation (Martin 2001, 118) rather than as an indication of divine punishment.

²¹ Koestermann 1965, 251.

²² For other references to these in the *Annals*, see Woodman 2016, 114.

²³ Koestermann 1965, 131 identifies the formulation *et deos et deas ipsas precor* as a Tiberian idiolect.

maiestas trials, something we have seen him fail to achieve.²⁴ The echo of Tiberius' earlier words emphasizes that the gods have not granted his requests, while the reference to Socrates' speech also implies that they may actually have a dire punishment in store for him. Even by refusing a cultic mode of memory in Spain, Tiberius has not stopped his subjects from treating him worshipfully, and now it is brought home to us that he is suffering at the gods' hands. As Rome slides—sometimes despite Tiberius' best efforts, sometimes because of his worst failings—further into savagery, and into an irreligiosity closely connected with that savagery, he is not exempt from punishment. Tiberius seems to understand that the gods are taking revenge upon him; this suggests a laudable level of insight into the mechanisms of divine punishment, something Germanicus famously lacked. But understanding what is going on does not make Tiberius any more able to stop it.

5.3 REMEMBERING SEJANUS

Because Tacitus' narrative of AD 30 does not survive, we cannot assess how religious concerns played a role in his treatment of Sejanus' downfall; but when the narrative resumes, we see similar themes and a similar pointing-back to the beginning of *Annals* 4. An unknown ally of Sejanus, in a speech of defense that is only partly preserved, notes that although Sejanus' fortune has turned for the worse (*Ann.* [5]6.2 *versa est fortuna, et ille quidem, qui collegam et generum adsciverat, sibi ignoscit*—"Fortune has changed, and the person who had taken him on as colleague and son-in-law pardons himself"), he will not join other fair-weather friends in denouncing him to win Tiberius' clemency ([5]6.3 *non crudelitatem, non clementiam cuiusquam experiar*—"I shall not test anyone's cruelty or clemency"). This, of course, recalls the change in *fortuna* at the beginning of *Annals* 4, but here it is not the Roman people's fortune that is changing, but one man's.²⁵ But the speaker's words are also an indictment of Tiberius' part in this. The change of Sejanus' *fortuna* is equivalent to a change in Tiberius' disposition toward him, and that Imperial change-of-heart stands to bring down many, such as the speaker, along with him: as Tacitus' subsequent narrative reveals, *saevitia* is still the order of the day. The speech also reminds us, uncomfortably, of the altars to *Amicitia* and

²⁴ Rogers 1935, 134.

²⁵ Dio reports a story that shortly before his fall, a statue of *fortuna* turned its back on Sejanus as he sacrificed (58.7.2–3); if Tacitus related this event in the missing portion of the *Annals*, *versa est fortuna* would have special significance here (see also Woodman 2016, 67–8). For Sejanus' relationship with *fortuna*, see Heinrichs 1976, 174–80; Champlin 2012, 382–6.

Clementia where the twin statues of Sejanus and Tiberius were worshipped (4.74.2); in the many executions that follow, *clementia* appears nowhere to be found.

A speech from Terentius, another of Sejanus' former friends who refuses to renounce him after his fall,²⁶ has similar import:

non enim Seianum Vulsiniensem, <s>ed Claudiae et Iuliae domus partem, quas adfinitate occupaverat, tuum, Caesar, generum, tui consulatus socium, tua officia in re publica capessentem colebamus. non est nostrum aestimare quem supra ceteros et quibus de causis extollas: tibi summum rerum iudicium di dedere, nobis obsequii gloria relicta est. (*Ann.* 6.8.3–4)

(For it was not as the man from Vulsinii, but as part of the Claudian and Julian house, which he had occupied by marriage, that we worshipped Sejanus—as your son-in-law, Caesar, as the colleague of your consulship, as the one taking up your duties in the state. It is not our job to assess whom you raise above the rest, and for what reasons. To you have the gods granted highest jurisdiction in affairs; to us is left the glory of obedience.)

Terentius freely acknowledges the cultivation of Sejanus that amounted to worshipful treatment, and even describes “venerating” Sejanus' minions Satrius and Pomponius (6.8.5 *venerabamur*), all of which, he says, Tiberius had actually encouraged through the way he treated Sejanus. Terentius is giving voice to what the reader has long seen Tacitus implying. From the time (just after the point when Tacitus announced that Rome's fortune changed for the worse) when Tiberius allowed statues of Sejanus to be worshipped (4.2.3 *coli...sineret*) to the recent statue and prayers to him (4.74.1–2), Tiberius has not done enough to stop people from exalting Sejanus as if he were a god, making him culpable in both the decline in cultic memory and in the rise of *saevitia* that have characterized Sejanus' ascendancy. Yet even so, Terentius does not even now abandon the problematic worshipful attitude to which he refers. His words imply both that Tiberius has a divine right to rule and that he is actually a god, for the speech has elements of hymnic style: the repetition of the second-person pronoun and the address to Tiberius as if he is present.²⁷ This recalls again the cletic-hymn-style prayers to both Tiberius and Sejanus of 4.74.2; even now, in Tiberian Rome's darkest hour, his subjects cannot resist speaking to and about the emperor in ways that evoke ritual. Another part of Terentius' defense is that Tiberius' opinions were difficult to tease out, like the predictions of a riddling oracle (6.8.4 *abditos, occultius, anceps*), again likening

²⁶ On Terentius (otherwise unknown), and Tacitus' depiction of his trial, see further Woodman 2016, 121–2.

²⁷ Furneaux 1896, 604; Woodman 2016, 124. On divine right to rule, see Koestermann 1965, 257.

Tiberius to a god.²⁸ Since Tiberius spares Terentius and in fact actually turns on his accusers (6.9.1), the speech clearly strikes a positive note with Tiberius. This episode makes a striking doublet with that of Cotta Messalinus (6.5–6), whom Tiberius also spares. Terentius' problematic use of ritual language highlights problems similar to those at issue in Messalinus' case (particularly Tiberius' failure to provide effective guidance on how members of the Imperial family or Imperial court are to be considered vis-à-vis the divine). Is it Tiberius' awareness of the prospect of divine punishment for his sins that sways him into sparing Terentius? Or the flattery of Terentius' address to the emperor as divine, divinely entitled to rule? Or something else entirely?

Despite that recognition, Tiberius does not (or perhaps cannot) stop further horrors from taking place as *Annals* 6 continues: for example, a spate of executions that strikes fear into the Senate (*Ann.* 6.9.3), the condemnation of a mother for weeping at her son's execution (6.10.1),²⁹ and the execution of some of Tiberius' oldest friends (6.10.2). And it does not stop even more sinister behavior from the emperor when the death of Agrippina is announced. Tacitus does not say for certain whether she killed herself because Tiberius' savageness (*saevitia*) toward her did not slacken even after Sejanus' death (6.25.1), or whether it was enforced starvation made to look like suicide; it is one of a series of ambiguous deaths in *Annals* 6, where Tacitus wants to at least leave open the possibility of Tiberius' involvement.³⁰ The reference to *saevitia* again brings us back to *Annals* 4.1.1; even after Sejanus is dead, Tiberius will continue the savagery set in motion by Rome's change of *fortuna*.

This makes the responses of Tiberius and the Senate to Agrippina's death all the more uncomfortable:

eodem die defunctam, quo biennio ante Seianus poenas luisset, memoriaeque id prodendum addidit Caesar iactavitque, quod non laqueo strangulata neque in Gemonias proiecta foret. actae ob id grates decretumque, ut quantum decimum kal. Novembres, utriusque necis die, per omnis annos donum Iovi sacraretur.

(*Ann.* 6.25.3)

(Caesar added that she had died on the same day on which Sejanus had paid the penalty two years before, and that that fact should be handed down to memory. He also boasted because she had not been strangled with the noose nor cast on to the Gemonian Stairs. On account of this, thanks were given, and it was decreed that every year on 18 October, the day of slaughter for both of them, a gift should be consecrated to Jupiter.)

²⁸ Cf. §2.5, pp. 104–5, on *Ann.* 2.54.4 *per ambages, ut mos oraculis*. For *occultus* in oracular contexts, cf. *Hist.* 1.10.3, 2.78.3, with Shannon 2014, 278–80. Also compare Tiberius' *aperiam* at *Ann.* 4.37.3 with *Hist.* 2.4.2 *futura aperit*.

²⁹ Prohibition of mourning is characteristically tyrannical behavior; see Woodman 2016, 131 and references there cited.

³⁰ Martin 2001, 153.

Such coincidences of dates fascinated the Romans,³¹ but Tacitus dismissed similar temporal coincidences about Augustus' death as "empty" (*vana*), implying that those who think them significant are overly credulous (*Ann.* 1.9.1). Tiberius here demands that such a coincidence should be inscribed into Roman cultural memory of the event, and the Senate responds with uncritical readiness to his request for commemoration. Significantly, the type of commemoration they provide is cultic: the deaths of Sejanus and Agrippina will be memorialized together, every year, by a gift of thanks to Jupiter. The reasons for thanksgiving are ambiguous. Are they happy that Agrippina is dead, or that her body was treated with respect, something about which Tiberius inappropriately boasts?

This will turn out to be the start of a worrying trend: the celebration of an Imperial family member's death (and possibly murder) with religious ritual. Worse will happen under Nero, when the Senate and people respond to the *princeps'* murder of Agrippina the Younger (*Ann.* 14.12.1) and Octavia (14.64.3) with religious celebrations. Here, nothing explicitly condemnatory is said about the dedications,³² and Tacitus is not as explicit about Tiberius' involvement in Agrippina the Elder's death as he later will be about Nero's in Agrippina the Younger's and Octavia's. But the seeds are planted for a religiously problematic trend that will escalate under Nero: when the emperors' family members die, even at his hands, his subjects will thank the gods. And Tiberius does nothing to stop, but everything to encourage, this behavior.

5.4 SIBYLLINE BOOKS: AN ATTEMPT AT TRADITION

As the reader reaches the end of Tiberius' life and reign, Tacitus will give several further clues about the nature of the religious decline to which Tiberius' principate has given rise, while also foreshadowing his death in ways that invite thoughts about fate—not only Tiberius', but all of Rome's. Tacitus also weaves in additional reports about senatorial procedures and issues of emperor cult that serve as a reminder of the major themes of Tiberius' reign as it hurtles to a close.

Following the deaths of Livia and Agrippina and the downfall of Sejanus, from a religious perspective Tiberian Rome is in dire straits; yet even at this low point, Tiberius appears to be doing his best to arrest the downward spiral in Roman cultic memory. In an altercation with a senator about the Sibylline books, the emperor—strikingly, given the religious errors to which he has

³¹ Woodman 1983, 101–2; Grafton and Swerdlow 1988; Feeney 2007, 144–5; Clarke 2008, 35–6.

³² Martin 2001, 154.

increasingly been prone—advocates for following traditional procedure. But the way the episode unfolds speaks volumes about how much attitudes to religious memory have changed over the course of Tiberius' principate.

[1] Relatum inde ad patres a Quintiliano tribuno plebei de libro Sibyllae, quem Caninius Gallus quindecimvirum recipi inter ceteros eiusdem vatis et ea de re senatus consultum postulaverat. quo per discessionem facto misit litteras Caesar, modice tribunum increpans ignarum antiqui moris ob iuventam. [2] Gallo exprobrabat quod scientiae caerimoniarumque vetus incerto auctore ante sententiam collegii, non, ut adsolet, lecto per magistros aestimatoque carmine, apud infrequenter senatum egisset. simul commonefecit, quia multa vana sub nomine celebri vulgabantur, sanxisse Augustum quem intra diem ad praetorem urbanum deferrentur neque habere privatim liceret. [3] quod a maioribus quoque decretum erat post exustum sociali bello Capitolium, quaesitis Samo, Ilio, Erythris, per Africam etiam ac Siciliam et Italicas colonias carminibus Sibyllae, una seu plures fuere, datoque sacerdotibus negotio quantum humana ope potuissent vera discernere. igitur tunc quoque notioni quindecimvirum is liber subicitur.

(*Ann.* 6.12.1–3)

(A motion was made before the Senate by Quintilianus, tribune of the plebs, about a book of the Sibyl which Caninius Gallus, one of the quindecimvirs, had demanded should be included among the other books of the same prophetess, also asking that the Senate should make a motion about the matter. After this was done on a division, Caesar sent letters moderately criticizing the tribune as ignorant of ancient custom because of his youth. [2] But Gallus he upbraided because, although he was a veteran of the discipline and its ceremonies, he had spoken before a sparsely attended Senate about a book of uncertain authorship, before getting an opinion from the college, when the poem had not (as was the custom) been read and assessed by the *magistri*. At the same time, the emperor reminded him that Augustus, because many false poems were being circulated under a famous name, had decreed a day by which they were to be brought to the urban praetor, and that it was not lawful to possess them privately. [3] (This had also been decreed by our ancestors after the burning of the Capitol during the Social War, seeking out poems of the Sibyl—whether there was just one or several—at Samos, Ilium, Erythrae, and even throughout Africa, Sicily, and the Italian colonies, and giving the priests the job of discerning the genuine ones, as far as was humanly possible.) Therefore at that time, too, this book was subjected to the examination of the quindecimvirs.)

Although adding a new Sibylline book was ultimately up to the Senate, it was supposed to base its decision on an assessment of the book by the quindecimvirs, who probably used acrostics to prove its validity.³³ Caninius Gallus (for whom the tribune Quintilianus serves as a puppet to bring up the matter

³³ Parke 1992, 139; Potter 1994, 150. On acrostics in the oracles, see Diels 1890, 25–8; Courtney 1990, 4–5.

before the Senate³⁴), as a quindecimvir himself, should know this traditional procedure, and that is why Tiberius criticizes him so sharply. If we compare this with the last time the Sibylline books came up in the Senate, we see a reversal of roles. When the Tiber flooded in AD 15, it was the senator Asinius Gallus (whom we also know to have been a quindecimvir) who proposed following traditional procedure in consulting the books about the flood and Tiberius who refused to allow this (*Ann.* 1.76.1).³⁵ Now it is the quindecimvir who deviates from the traditional norm and the emperor who forces him back on track. A lot has changed in Rome during the seventeen years Tiberius has been emperor: at the beginning of his reign, quindecimvirs could be relied upon to offer their religious expertise in senatorial matters, but now it cannot be assumed that even these high-profile priests will uphold Rome's age-old cultic procedures. It is not clear whether Caninius does not know the proper procedure, or knows it but attempts to evade it for some reason; either way, for a quindecimvir to risk perverting a process so sensitive as the authentication of a prophetic book is a serious offense from the point of view of cultic memory. And it is not just to the priests that a disengagement with religious traditions is apparent: the senators' lack of interest in the matter is revealed by the low numbers in the meeting where the book was being discussed.³⁶ Since that first discussion of the Sibylline books in 1.76.1, we have seen the Senate come full circle: starting out as a body that at least tried to advocate for traditional procedure and progressing through *aporia* and incompetence (e.g. in the asylum meeting, 3.60–3) to cultic flattery of Tiberius, the Senate has become so blasé about matters of cult that many members do not even attend the meeting where something as important as the Sibylline books are being discussed.

But although Tiberius here offers a salutary reminder to the Senate and the quindecimvirs about how things ought to be done, he does not come out of the incident perfectly, either; his relationship with the Senate is shown not to be a good one. Tiberius' criticism of Quintilianus (although mild) and of Caninius (more severe) is part of a larger pattern of sinister attacks that manifest themselves increasingly in his letters in *Annals* 6,³⁷ and their threatening character suggests a *princeps* increasingly hostile to his subjects. Furthermore, citing the precedent of Augustus suggests that Tiberius himself has an imperfect understanding of the problem. Augustus' famous consolidation of the Sibylline books to remove them from private hands and bring them within

³⁴ Tribunes of the *plebs* had the right (even if rarely exercised) to bring a motion before the Senate (*ius relationis*; Talbert 1984, 186–7; Woodman 2016, 140), but quindecimvirs did not (Furneaux 1896, 610). For Caninius Gallus' tenure of the priesthood, see Rüpke 2008, 597.

³⁵ See §1.1, p. 27.

³⁶ On senatorial quorums and the historical Tiberius' attitudes to Senate attendance, see Talbert 1984, 136–8.

³⁷ Morello 2006, 345.

state control is really a different action from what is at issue here, namely, what should be done when a new book comes to light. Tiberius' "reminder" to Caninius about what Augustus did could be an attempt to remind him that there is always a risk that any new Sibylline book could be spurious, and that it therefore has to be carefully checked according to established procedures.³⁸ But there is another possible subtext of Tiberius' words: if, as he notes, Augustus made sure that all inauthentic Sibylline books were off the streets, the implication is that any book currently in circulation that is not already part of the state archives is definitely a spurious one that was illegally kept in private hands. In other words, while Tiberius insists that the *quindecimvirs* check this new book according to the traditional principles, by invoking Augustus' policing of the books he implies that they will certainly find it to be spurious. This is similar to Tiberius' problematic recommendation about the *flamen Dialis* (*Ann.* 3.71.2–3): while he was certainly right to insist that the *flamen* could not leave Rome, in refusing to look any further back than Augustus in order to justify his position, he displayed a striking disregard for the whole weight of Roman cultic memory. Here that same idea is expressed in a more sinister fashion. Because of Augustus' ruling, Tiberius implies, he already knows what the *quindecimvirs* will find when they investigate the book; it hardly seems they will have true freedom to act. We are not told the final ruling on the book's authenticity; as with the asylum debate (3.60–3), a feeling of ineffectiveness and uncertainty hangs in the air, leaving doubt about Senate's and priests' ability to cope with the demands of Rome's traditional religious system.

The last time Tiberius used Augustan precedent as a guide for his own opinions on religious matters, during the *flamen Dialis* debate, he did also at least consider the kinds of decisions that had been made on the matter *before* Augustus (*Ann.* 3.71.3). That does not happen now. Instead, it is Tacitus in his own voice who looks further back in time, giving the reader an example of a time when similar assessment of the Sibylline books had to be made after the Capitoline temple burned in 83 BC, destroying all of the scrolls.³⁹ From the perspective of cultic memory, assembling a new set of Sibylline books is an extremely important act, for it enables the Roman prodigy-expiation system that is essential to the health of the community to continue into the future by reconstituting a key tool for determining the gods' will that had been lost to civil war. To Tacitus, the past seems to look brighter than the present. While these nameless "ancestors" anticipated Augustus' same

³⁸ So Satterfield 2008, 216.

³⁹ The indicative verb in the *quod*-clause indicates that the sentence is no longer part of Tiberius' speech, reported in *oratio obliqua* (cf. Koestermann 1965, 270; Woodman 2016, 143). This happened during the civil wars, not, as Tacitus claims, during the Social Wars. For this "error," see Syme 1958, 746; Martin 2001, 130.

concern with keeping the books out of private hands,⁴⁰ they surpassed him in their thoroughness, finding prophecies from the canonical ten Sibyls scattered all over the Mediterranean and adhering closely to traditional procedure by mandating that the priests assess the books' validity despite the almost superhuman difficulty of the task.⁴¹ This window back into the past, to a time when the *quindecimvirs* took seriously their difficult but important role in saving Roman ritual from oblivion, and when the priests and the Senate acted together without interference from a *princeps*, provides a sharp contrast with the events of AD 32. Tacitus thus uses the episode to remind us how far Rome has slipped not only from the beginning of Tiberius' principate, but from the pre-Imperial era.

5.5 TIBERIUS THE ASTROLOGER

If the episode of the Sibylline books invites the reader to consider the pre-Tiberian past, an incident a few chapters later invites us to consider a post-Tiberian future and also to consider the magnitude of the breakdown in Tiberius' ability to preserve Rome's religious traditions in the present. After a particularly dismal spate of trials, banishments, and executions (*Ann.* 6.18–19), we are told of Caligula's marriage⁴² and increasingly obsequious behavior toward Tiberius, all signs of his future power that prompt the orator Passienus to say that "there had never been a better slave or a worse master" than Caligula and Tiberius (6.20.1 *neque meliorem umquam servum neque deteriorem dominum fuisse*).⁴³ This leads Tacitus into a sequence of three passages on the theme of astrology and its predictive powers and Tiberius' close connection to this art. The first is "Tiberius' prophecy" (*Ann.* 6.20.2 *praesagium Tiberii*) that Galba would "one day taste power" (*quandoque degustabis imperium*). In some ways this is a non sequitur after the discussion of Caligula, tacked on because this is the year of Galba's consulship (*tum consule*).⁴⁴ This produces a striking contrast between office-holding and the Imperial succession: as Davies notes, "The irony of a consul being told that

⁴⁰ Here I take *neque habere privatim liceret* as the referent of *quod* (*Ann.* 6.12.3).

⁴¹ Varro is the source for the list of ten Sibyls (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.62, Lactant. *Div. inst.* 1.6). Cf. Parke 1992, 148–9 n. 5; Potter 1994, 71–6.

⁴² On its date, see Woodman 2016, 167–8.

⁴³ For this interpretation of the passage, cf. Ash 2013, 436; Woodman 2016, 169.

⁴⁴ Tacitus is the only author to relate the prediction to the year of Galba's consulship. Dio 57.19.4 dates it to AD 20, in the aftermath of the death of Germanicus. Joseph. *AJ* 18.211 gives no date but does not connect it with Galba's consulship. Suetonius ascribes it to Augustus, not Tiberius (*Galb.* 4.1). See Woodman 2016, 170, 172.

he *will later* have *imperium* . . . should not be missed.”⁴⁵ In this topsy-turvy world, the only way to have power is to become emperor, and the metaphor of “tasting” power, with its implications of bloodthirstiness,⁴⁶ reminds us of the principate’s deadly consequences. Tiberius’ pronouncement about Caligula is thematically linked to Passienus’ observation on Caligula because both deal with dark moments in the future of the principate. Tacitus asks us to consider what will happen after Tiberius in the short term (the reign of Caligula) and after the Julio-Claudians in the long term (Galba’s brief hold on the principate during the civil war chronicled in the *Histories*).

But what makes Tiberius’ prediction about Galba different from Passienus’ similarly dark pronouncement about Caligula is its source: Tiberius arrived at it “thanks to his knowledge of the skill of the Chaldaeans” (*Ann.* 6.20.2 *scientia Chaldaeorum artis*), which he had learned from Thrasyllus while on Rhodes. Tacitus then provides further background on Tiberius’ personal relationship with astrology by discussing his tests of astrologers on Rhodes: any whose predictions were judged to be false were cast down into the sea from a rocky outcropping. Thrasyllus, when subjected to such a test, cast his own horoscope and successfully predicted his own impending doom, whereupon Tiberius congratulated him on his success, pronounced him safe from danger, and enrolled him in his circle of innermost friends (6.21). Next comes a chapter of Tacitus’ ruminations on the art of astrology in general (6.22).⁴⁷ This sequence may at first glance seem organized according to stream of consciousness or free association, but it is carefully planned. In its last sentence, Tacitus returns to the idea of predictions about future emperors: “For Nero’s command was predicted by the son of this same Thrasyllus, as will be noted at the proper time, so that now I do not wander too far away from my theme” (6.22.4 *quippe a filio eiusdem Thrasulli praedictum Neronis imperium in tempore memorabitur, ne nunc incepto longius abierim*).⁴⁸ Again, it is a bad emperor to whom Tacitus points, the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.⁴⁹ Therefore, these two predictions about future emperors that bookend the section on astrology relate the art of reading the stars very closely with regime change—but not an immediate one, for both predictions look forward to the emperor who will end the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the one who will immediately follow it. Indeed, Passienus’ reference to Caligula is *not* connected to astrology;

⁴⁵ Davies 2004, 166 n. 76.

⁴⁶ See Woodman 2006b, 182–8.

⁴⁷ See Koestermann 1965, 288; Martin 2001, 145; Woodman 2016, 169–70 on the logic of the passage.

⁴⁸ Woodman 2016, 169–70 notes the elements of ring composition with which Tacitus ties this observation about Thrasyllus to the beginning of his excursus on astrology.

⁴⁹ Tacitus will not return to the prediction about Nero until *Ann.* 14.9.3 (see §7.3, pp. 298–9), which most commentators have taken as a reference to the same consultation (Furneaux 1896, 623; Koestermann 1965, 294; Martin 2001, 150; Woodman 2004, 177 n. 71; Woodman 2016, 184).

so the stars have nothing to say about what will happen in the immediate aftermath of Tiberius' death. That suggests that if the gods have consequences in store for all of the religious errors that we have seen festering in the Tiberian hexad, they will not come for many years.

This personal interest in astrology is a detail of Tiberius' personality that Tacitus has not previously revealed,⁵⁰ although the Thrasyllus episode proves that his preoccupation dates from his exile to Rhodes as a young man. The parallel accounts of Suetonius (*Tib.* 14.4) and Dio (55.11.1–3), by comparison, both mention Tiberius' astrology earlier in their narratives, during their accounts of his period on Rhodes, and both relate how Thrasyllus predicted Tiberius' recall to Rome as soon as he saw in the distance the ship he rightly guessed was carrying the news. Tacitus' decision to withhold reference to Tiberius' study of astrology until now, near the end of his account of his principate, relates Tiberius' prognosticative skill more closely to his successors than to his own acquisition of Imperial power. Furthermore, Tacitus is also unique in presenting the trial on Rhodes as an audition for Thrasyllus to become the emperor's personal astrology teacher by casting his own horoscope. Suetonius implies that Thrasyllus had already been enrolled as Tiberius' teacher before the test, Dio gives no indication that Thrasyllus actually taught Tiberius astrology at all, and in neither of their versions is Thrasyllus' prediction made by astrological means.⁵¹ Tacitus also emphasizes Tiberius' desire to practice astrology personally, as Dio and Suetonius do not. Therefore, Tacitus' portrayal of Tiberius' connection with astrology has several important elements that parallel accounts lack: that the emperor himself is a practitioner of the art, that astrology is discussed only toward the end of his life, and that Tiberius auditioned his own teacher in this murderous way. Tiberius comes across as a sinister, probing (as he also probed Galba—6.20.2 *diversis sermonibus pertemptatum*), and able to see the outcome of things, but only far in the future, not events that will take place during or immediately after his own reign. This is significant for determining the timeline upon which the arc of divine vengeance for the religious errors of the principate will play out. As Tiberius' reign draws to a close, the emperor's own prognosticative powers can see only Galba, but not the divine anger that Tacitus has told us plagued his own reign.

Yet neither the fact that the emperor himself should practice astrology, nor the method by which he acquired his skill, is unproblematic. While educated Romans would likely have had some basic knowledge of astronomy,

⁵⁰ Cf. Martin 2001, 146; Woodman 2016, 170.

⁵¹ Suet. *Tib.* 14.4 notes that Tiberius had previously brought Thrasyllus into his circle (pluperf. *admoverat*). Dio (55.11.1, 57.15.7) does not suggest that Thrasyllus is the source of the emperor's astrological skill, and implies that his relationship with Tiberius predated the test on Rhodes; see Oliver 1980, 145; Swan 2004, 135.

astrology was a serious science, and only career experts could master the amount and complexity of astrological lore.⁵² Although practitioners like Thrasyllus might move in elite circles, astrology is frequently maligned as an occupation for foreigners and members of the lower classes; according to Roman cultural assumptions, then, astrology, while it may be a serious intellectual pursuit, is perhaps not the best use of time for a member of the Imperial family.⁵³ And in the process of auditioning astrologers, the emperor inflicted deadly punishment on those who were rejected: a burly freedman assistant “went ahead of the man whose skill Tiberius had decided to put to the test along trackless and steep places (for the house overhung crags); on his journey back, if suspicion of insincerity or deceit had come in, he cast him into the sea beneath so that he would not come forward as an informer on the secret” (*Ann.* 6.21.1 (*nam saxis domus imminet*) *praeibat eum cuius artem experiri Tiberius statuisset et regredientem, si vanitatis aut fraudum suspicio incesserat, in subiectum mare praecipitabat, ne index arcani existeret*). What is this secret (*arcanum*) Tiberius is afraid the “failed” astrologers would reveal? The fact that Tacitus does not tell us is again a difference from parallel accounts, which indicate that Tiberius wanted to kill Thrasyllus because he knew too many of Tiberius’ secrets (Suet. *Tib.* 14.4; Dio 55.11.2). But as we have seen, since in Tacitus’ account the test of Thrasyllus predates any close association between the two, that cannot be what he means by *index arcani*. This seems to be the two men’s first encounter, or at least to have occurred early in their relationship; the only thing Thrasyllus would be able to know about Tiberius at this point is the question Tiberius asked of him on that crag.⁵⁴ Elsewhere in the *Annals*, *arcana* are dangerous Imperial secrets whose revelation could compromise the emperor’s power.⁵⁵ It is possible that Tiberius is afraid that astrologers, unless he prevents them by putting them to death, will use their skills to make predictions about the emperor that are potentially dangerous if revealed to the public.⁵⁶ But if the astrologers Tiberius has put to death are the incompetent ones whose predictions do not come true, it would seem that Tiberius would have little to fear from them (or at least that if they posed a threat, it was not because there was any risk that they would reveal some *true* secret). Perhaps *arcanum* refers to the entire

⁵² Cramer 1954, 89; MacMullen 1966, 137–9.

⁵³ See Barton 1994a, 32–3 and references there cited. Petronius associates astrology with the superstitious and credulous lower classes (Petron. 35, 76.10–11; cf. Courtney 2001, 80). Note also, however, the cautions of Ripat 2011, 120–8, 134–6. For Tiberius’ astrology as the marker of a bad *princeps*, see Barton 1994a, 43–4 and Barton 1994b, 54–5.

⁵⁴ This is how Woodman 2016, 175 interprets *arcanum*; but he emends *Ann.* 6.21.1 to read *super ta<cito> negotio*, so that Tacitus would have Tiberius consulting “about a secret matter” (Woodman 2016, 174). I, along with most editors of the text, have retained Pichena’s *ta*, “on such an important matter,” which does not make the secrecy of Tiberius’ question obvious.

⁵⁵ See §2.5, pp. 108–9.

⁵⁶ So Champlin 2008, 413.

process of consultation, to Tiberius' interest in astrology, which he, knowing the reputation of the art and its practitioners, does not want to become public knowledge. The word also recalls the unrepeatable secrets of a mystery cult; the phrase *index arcani* appears only once elsewhere in extant Latin literature, when Livy (39.13.1) uses it to describe an informant on the Bacchanalian conspiracy of 186 BC that was seen as a threat to the state.⁵⁷ So Tacitus' use of the phrase may imply that Tiberius' practice of astrology is similarly dangerous, a reflection that Tiberius knows that he is treading on dangerous ground. Worrying, too, is Tiberius' reliance on the Thrasyllus: after the astrologer passes the test, Tiberius "kept him among his most intimate friends, accepting whatever he said in the place of an oracle" (*Ann.* 6.21.3 *quaeque dixerat oraculi vice accipiens inter intimos amicorum tenet*). Instead of using one of the accepted channels to the divine built into traditional Roman religion (oracles and other divination), Tiberius consults an astrologer; because he has Thrasyllus, he does not need oracles. Perhaps, the implication is, Tiberius should have spent less time on astrology and more time on ensuring the longevity of Rome's cultic traditions. His skill at casting horoscopes sits ironically next to his incompetence (or not-quite-competence) when it comes to the Sibylline books, a traditional, state-sanctioned means of prophecy.

Yet importantly, for all the problems that astrology raises, both of the specific astrological predictions Tacitus mentions here will ultimately prove to be true. An important part of this episode for Tacitus is a consideration of astrology's validity as a way of predicting the will of fate: "For me, when I hear these and similar things, my judgment is uncertain as to whether mortal affairs are turned by fate and immutable necessity, or by chance" (*Ann.* 6.22.1 *sed mihi haec ac talia audienti in incerto iudicium est, fatone res mortalium et necessitate immutabili an forte volvantur*). This initial statement of *aporia* opens the way for musings on the Epicurean and Stoic positions on fate—a quandary, as I have noted, in which Tacitus refuses to come down on one side or the other.⁵⁸ While the passage relates strictly to astrology's power to predict the future and cannot necessarily be read as a general statement about the primacy of fate or fortune, it is important that Tacitus raises the question at this point in the text, when Tiberius' reign is lurching to its close and the atmosphere of gloom is intensifying. Even if, as Martin is surely right to state, "it is more prudent to accept what he says at the beginning of the chapter" than to attempt to assign victory to either the Stoics or the Epicureans,⁵⁹ it almost does not matter who turns out to be right. Tacitus' viewpoint seems to come closer to that of "the man-in-the-street,"⁶⁰ that astrology is a generally

⁵⁷ Cf. Livy 39.8; North 1979, 93–5; Beard et al. 1998, i.91–6, 98; Briscoe 2008, 230–50.

⁵⁸ See §0.3, pp. 21–2.

⁵⁹ Martin 2001, 149. Cf. Sinclair 1995, 55–6.

⁶⁰ Martin 2001, 149; Woodman 2016, 171.

reliable science sometimes undermined by the deceit and/or ignorance of its practitioners (*Ann.* 6.22.3). Tacitus highlights the damage these people have done to “the faith in an art which has clear proofs both in ancient times and in our own” (6.22.3 *fidem artis cuius clara documenta et antiqua aetas et nostra tulerit*), among which is the prediction of Thrasyllus’ son about Nero, linked to *Ann.* 6.22.3 with the explanatory particle *quippe* (6.22.4). Tacitus’ authorial statement in 6.22.4 implies endorsement of the notion that the prediction about Nero was true (otherwise why would he promise to discuss it later?), which in turn suggests he at least on some level shares this view that astrological predictions, when made by *good* astrologers (not, for example, the incompetents who predicted Tiberius’ death years earlier when he first left Rome, 4.58.2), are a valid way to interpret the future. Regardless of whether *fatum* or *fortuna* is predominant in determining the course of events, on a larger timescale that stretches beyond the bounds of Tiberius’ own reign, it can provide mortals with some—but only some—answers about the future.

5.6 INTERPRETING THE PHOENIX

A few chapters later, at the beginning of the next narrative year, Tacitus reinforces the idea that human understanding has its limits, with the report of a phoenix that he claims was seen in Egypt in AD 34.

Paulo Fabio L. Vitellio consulibus post longum saeculorum ambitum avis phoenix in Aegyptum venit praebuitque materiem doctissimis indigenarum et Graecorum multa super eo miraculo disserendi. de quibus congruunt et plura ambigua, sed cognitu non absurda promere libet. (*Ann.* 6.28.1)

(During the consulship of Paulus Fabius and L. Vitellius, after a long cycle of centuries a phoenix bird appeared in Egypt and provided the most learned natives and Greeks with the basis for many discussions about the miracle. It is enjoyable to disclose the things they agreed about, and the even greater number of things that are ambiguous but not absurd to consider.)

Inserting this report at the beginning of the narrative year is unusual and highlights its importance,⁶¹ but why does Tacitus mention the phoenix at all? Its story certainly resonates thematically with the surrounding narrative, as Keitel has pointed out: the filial piety of a newborn phoenix burying its dead parent contrasts with Tiberius’ lack of *pietas* toward his family members.⁶² In this, the phoenix functions like the ominous death of the *figus Ruminalis* during Nero’s reign (13.58), and its reminder of Romulus and Remus resonates

⁶¹ Syme 1958, 774.

⁶² Keitel 1999, 434–5. Martin 2001, 158 is skeptical of this interpretation.

with Nero's impious murder of Britannicus, his brother by adoption.⁶³ Yet the phoenix episode is fundamentally different: while people will interpret the death of the *ficus* as a dire prodigy (13.58 *prodigii loco habitum est*), no one in Tacitus' text has a similar reaction to the phoenix.

It is significant that Tacitus places this report at the beginning not just of a narrative year, but of *this particular* narrative year. Dio and Pliny (*HN* 10.5), who both also mention this phoenix, place the bird's appearance in AD 36, two years closer to the emperor's death than Tacitus does. This "error" on Tacitus' part has caused scholars much consternation. Syme interprets it as an attempt "to demonstrate in a gentle and insidious fashion that prophecies and portents have no meaning,"⁶⁴ but nothing within the narrative indicates that the phoenix is actually a portent. Indeed, Tacitus explicitly does *not* make the bird into one of many omens of Tiberius' impending death, unlike Dio (58.27.1). The phoenix was an object of heated discussion at the time, but the content of the digression implies that this interest was only in facts about the phoenix (what it looks like, how often it appears, how it behaves), not in its significance. This is a contrast with other reports of *miracula* in Tacitus, such as Vespasian's healing miracles (*Hist.* 4.84), which Tacitus does weave into a larger narrative of divine favor for the Flavians.⁶⁵ Still, neither does Tacitus insist, or even imply, that the whole thing is a hoax. Even if he does not endorse all the stories told about phoenixes (he considers the report of the bird's arduous journey to immolate its dead parent at the Altar of the Sun in Heliopolis "uncertain and exaggerated by the mythical," *Ann.* 6.28.6 *haec incerta et fabulosis aucta*), he does not share the opinion of those identifying the Tiberian phoenix as false due to a discrepancy in the dating (*Ann.* 6.28.4) and he goes out of his way to affirm the phoenix's existence: "But it is not in doubt that from time to time that bird is seen in Egypt" (6.28.6 *ceterum aspici aliquando in Aegypto eam volucrem non ambigitur*).⁶⁶ So the phoenix straddles a complicated line; it is real, but it is not a sign that Tiberius is about to die, as one might be tempted to think. It is a *miraculum*, but not a portent. Even if the phoenix does not demonstrate, implicitly or explicitly, that portents are meaningless, it does contribute to a sense that supernatural occurrences are always difficult to interpret.

The passage is also characterized by an antiquarian focus on memory and tradition. After a detailed assessment of the evidence for the different claims regarding the length of the cycle of the phoenix's appearances,⁶⁷ Tacitus interrupts himself to say, "but antiquity, certainly, is obscure" (*Ann.* 6.28.4

⁶³ Keitel 1999, 440. On the passage, see §7.2, pp. 290–2.

⁶⁴ Syme 1958, 774. Martin 2001, 159 notes that there is no independent evidence to support either date. See also Townend 1960, 118–19; Woodman 2016, 204–6.

⁶⁵ See Shannon 2013, 13–14; Shannon 2014, 284–5.

⁶⁶ Shannon 2013, 14–15. Here I disagree with Keitel 1999, 430.

⁶⁷ Jacobson 1981 identifies the Egyptian kings mentioned.

sed antiquitas quidem obscura),⁶⁸ before introducing dissenting voices. Similarly, critics claim that the phoenix that appeared between Ptolemy and Tiberius was false “and performed none of the things that ancient memory confirms” (6.28.4 *nihilque usurpavisse ex his quae vetus memoria firmavit*).⁶⁹ This focus on traditional assessments of the phoenix’s validity (or lack thereof) seems to be aimed at the reader. The phoenix provides a case study in the interpretation of supernatural phenomena, and in the information about such phenomena that cultural memory can preserve. We are given a wealth of detail about the phoenix’s sanctity, appearance, manifestations during the reigns of Egyptian kings, and miraculous funeral rites for its parent, with little authorial guidance, and it is up to us to sort out the true from the false, the credible from the incredible. It is important that Tacitus gives the reader that lesson at this particular point. Even if the phoenix is not explicitly a portent of the divine wrath we have known about since the beginning of *Annals* 4, the Roman tendency to focus on cycles, recurrences, and anniversaries subtly contributes to the reader’s sense that something momentous is not far off.⁷⁰ The idea of filial piety invites us to connect this with the Imperial succession; we want to know who will guide Rome’s next cycle. But Tacitus teases us if he is nudging us toward this interpretation of the phoenix: Tiberius will not die for three more years, and meanwhile, the grim spate of executions continues uninterrupted.⁷¹ Much as Tiberius’ astrological predictions about Galba would give him only part of the story, an assessment of the traditional discourse of knowledge about the phoenix can only tell the reader so much.

5.7 COMMEMORATING AUGUSTUS, PREDICTING CALIGULA

With this uncertain, but evidently dark, future looming, we are also reminded again of the past: of Tiberius’ complicated relationship with the commemoration of his deified predecessor, and of his own, often misdirected, concern for his own posthumous reputation. A notice about rebuilding financed by Tiberius after a fire on the Aventine Hill in AD 36 (this time seen by no one as an omen, much like the phoenix, despite its much closer proximity to Tiberius’ death)

⁶⁸ For this historiographical topos, see Woodman 2016, 209 and parallels there cited.

⁶⁹ See Woodman 2016, 210 for useful remarks on *memoria*. ⁷⁰ See Syme 1958, 772–4.

⁷¹ The phoenix notice comes between deaths of two illustrious Aemilii Lepidi (*Ann.* 6.27.4: M. Lepidus; 6.29.3–4: Mamercus Scaurus), so “the reader might at first hope that the Aemilii Lepidi, like a Phoenix, will survive the reign of Tiberius... This hope is soon dashed” (Keitel 1999, 432–3). Cf. Devillers 1994, 59–60.

leads Tacitus into a consideration of Tiberius' meager contributions to public building in Rome:

milies sestertium in munificentia <ea> conlocatum, tanto acceptius in vulgum, quanto modicus privatis aedificationibus ne publice quidem nisi duo opera struxit, templum Augusto et scaenam Pompeiani theatri; eaque perfecta, contemptu ambitionis an per senectutem, haud dedicavit. (*Ann.* 6.45.1)

(One hundred million sesterces were allocated for that gesture of munificence, all the more acceptable to the people because of how moderate he was in private buildings, and because even publicly he built only two works: the temple for Augustus and the stage-building of Pompey's theater. And although he finished them, he did not dedicate them, either out of contempt for ambition or because of old age.)

The phrase *contemptu ambitionis* recalls the discourse of *ambitio* and reputation that characterized Tiberius' refusal of a temple for himself in Spain (4.37–8). Tiberius made the speech refusing the temple because he thought he needed to respond to rumormongers who alleged that their emperor was starting to deviate toward *ambitio* by accepting divine honors (4.37.1), and his speech responds exactly to those allegations when he claims to reject the Spanish temple and all future temples because it would be “ambitious” to accept them (4.37.3 *ambitiosus*). And the critics who found fault with Tiberius' refusal dislike the contemptuous attitude they think he is taking to his posthumous reputation by refusing to allow the temple (4.38.5 *contemptu famae contemni virtutes*). That same contempt is here offered by Tacitus as a possible reason for Tiberius' failure to dedicate the temple to *divus Augustus* in Rome,⁷² and it can be interpreted in either a more positive or a more negative light. An “indifference to popularity”⁷³ could potentially be seen as a good quality in an emperor, and Tiberius' contempt for *ambitio* here could be motivated in part by the allegations of *ambitio* during the Spanish temple episode. Perhaps he thought a concerted effort at a building program, just like allowing Spaniards to build him a temple, would put him in danger of entering into too close a competition with *divus Augustus* the master builder.⁷⁴ The fact that this particular building involves Imperial cult makes it even more dangerous: given what people said about him the last time temples of emperors came up for discussion (4.37.1), perhaps Tiberius now thinks that his involvement in matters of emperor worship will always open him up to being criticized for *ambitio* no matter what he does. Tiberius' decision not to dedicate the temple to Augustus in Rome could, therefore, be a savvy one:

⁷² Tacitus does not indicate whether contempt or old age is the truer explanation of his motive (Koestermann 1965, 348; Whitehead 1979, 484).

⁷³ Phrase used in Martin 2001, 184; see also Woodman 2016, 268.

⁷⁴ For Tiberius' notorious lack of a building program, see Levick 1976, 123; Woodman and Martin 1996, 317.

he was certain to anger someone by dedicating it, so he decides it is wiser not to dedicate it at all.

Yet just as the critics claimed in *Ann.* 4.38, Tiberius still does the wrong thing when it comes to securing his own reputation. Since those critics considered him insufficiently concerned with his posthumous reputation (*contemptu famae*), we can likewise imagine that those same people would be supremely unimpressed by the disregard for his posthumous reputation (*contemptu ambitionis*)⁷⁵ that Tiberius shows by failing to dedicate two high-profile buildings in the Roman cityscape, especially when one of them, Augustus' temple, has been promised since the beginning of his principate more than twenty years prior (1.10.8 *templum et caelestes honores decernuntur*). If deification and a building program are two ways a *princeps* can ensure he is remembered positively after death, Tiberius is showing himself to be extremely bad at both. He also fails to take account of public opinion about *divus Augustus*. If the Spanish temple critics' attitude to Tiberius implied a certain acceptance of Augustus' divinity, the idea that he "deserved" it as much as did Hercules, Liber, and Quirinus, all of whom had temples or other cult sites in Rome,⁷⁶ one could imagine that those same critics would not approve of Tiberius' failure to ensure that *divus Augustus* got what they thought he deserved. Viewed in this light, the failure to dedicate Augustus' temple is once again bound to ensure Tiberius' unpopularity. It also suggests insincerity in his devotion to the *divus*. He may have said he wanted to preserve Augustus' divine honors (4.37.3), but when it comes to honoring him actively with cultic commemoration, Tiberius balks.

But paradoxically, in another sense Tiberius is overly concerned with the memory of Augustus: when it comes to the choice of a successor. A few chapters before "finish[ing] his mortality" (*Ann.* 6.50.4 *mortalitatem explevisse*), Tiberius mulls over the Julio-Claudian options. Tiberius Gemellus is too young,⁷⁷ Caligula too distasteful, Claudius too stupid to be *princeps*,

sin extra domum successor quaereretur, ne memoria Augusti, ne nomen Caesarum in ludibria et contumelias verterent metuebat: quippe illi non perinde curae gratia praesentium quam in posteros ambitio. mox incertus animi, fesso corpore consilium cui impar erat fato permisit, iactis tamen vocibus per quas intellexeretur providus futurorum. (6.46.2–3)

⁷⁵ The sense of *ambitio* here (*OLD* s.v. *ambitio* 3, "a striving after popularity, currying favour") comes very close to that of *fama* in 4.38.5 (*OLD* s.v. *fama* 5a, "the report which a person has, one's reputation," 6a "one's good name, reputation," 7 "fame, glory, renown").

⁷⁶ For Hercules' Roman cult sites, see Richardson 1992, 185–9. For Quirinus' temple and prestigious priesthood (the *flamen Quirinalis*), see Richardson 1992, 326–7; Rüpke 2008, 8. Liber was worshipped at a temple on the Aventine (Richardson 1992, 80–1) and was honored each March in the Liberalia.

⁷⁷ On his age, see Woodman 2016, 272.

(but if a successor were sought outside the house, he was afraid that the memory of Augustus and the name of the Caesars would become a laughing stock and a source of insult; for he did not care so much about the goodwill of men of the present as he did about currying favor among posterity. Soon, uncertain in his mind and physically worn out, he left to fate a decision to which he was unequal, although throwing out words in which he could be understood to be foretelling the future.)

Tiberius thinks the best way to honor the memory of Augustus, and indeed to ensure that the place he will hold in Roman cultural memory is a positive one, is apparently not building him temples, but making certain that the next *princeps* has Augustus' blood. There is a fundamental irony in the fact that Tiberius himself can foresee the negative consequences of that prioritization. Partly this is because of Tiberius' awareness of "real-world" factors like Caligula's poor character and the manipulative nature of his relationship with Macro,⁷⁸ but partly, Tacitus suggests, it is because of Tiberius' ability to predict the future. In three *sententiae* he predicts that he himself is the setting sun whom Macro is deserting for the rising Caligula; that Caligula will have all of Sulla's vices and none of his virtues; and that Caligula will kill Tiberius Gemellus before being killed by another (6.46.4). This recalls his equally *sententious praesagium* of Galba's taste of power, foreseen thanks to Tiberius' skill in astrology (6.20.2). The present trio of observations on Caligula are also described with words that suggest prognostication (6.46.3 *providus*, 4 *praedixit*),⁷⁹ and the particulars of his first and third predictions are indeed borne out: Macro would spectacularly desert Tiberius by throwing a pile of clothes on him and walking away during his last moments (6.50.5), and Caligula would kill Gemellus and subsequently die at an assassin's hand (events Tacitus would presumably have mentioned in the missing portion of the *Annals*). Although Tiberius can foresee how bad Caligula will be, he nevertheless refuses to appoint a successor, a task he leaves to fate (6.46.3).⁸⁰ Tiberius' presentiments about Caligula may well owe something to his knowledge of astrology, and by "leaving to fate" the choice of a successor Tacitus may mean at least partly to indicate that Tiberius had seen something in the stars that he felt powerless to override. But as Tacitus' aporetic disquisition on the meaning of astrology has recently impressed upon us (6.22), it is impossible to tell for sure whether what the stars appear to predict is truly ineluctable; so if Tiberius thought that it was, he may have been wrong. This indeterminacy has also been anticipated by the problem of the phoenix: although the audience (both inside and outside the text) senses that it is important, it cannot capitalize on that instinct in any meaningful way. Similarly, Tiberius' astrological skill

⁷⁸ *Ann.* 6.46.1. See Klaassen 2014, 232; Woodman 2016, 272.

⁷⁹ Cf. Woodman 2016, 274 on *providus*.

⁸⁰ Cf. Joseph. *AJ* 18.213–5, where Tiberius feels compelled to appoint Caligula his successor in response to an omen, and feels powerless to protect Tiberius Gemellus.

enables him to predict the future, but his human weaknesses of body and mind prevent him from changing it, as does his misplaced and misguided concern with posthumous memory,⁸¹ his fear that Augustus and the name of the Caesars will have their memory tarnished—as if it will *not* be tarnished by the horrible principate of Caligula.

5.8 CONCLUSIONS

Is this all part of the manifestation of the gods' wrath of which the reader was told at *Ann.* 4.1? The fact that no one in the text seems to have any idea that the gods are angry may suggest so. While Agrippina and Sabinus may have been able to point out the ritual problems evident during Tiberius' principate, and while Tiberius himself attempts to correct deviations in the procedure for ensuring the authenticity of Rome's prophetic books, no one recognizes the larger pattern of divine anger at work in Tiberius' reign as a whole. Thanks to Tacitus' observations, the reader is aware of this larger arc, but his characters are repeatedly denied the chance to know what is in store for them. It does not occur to anyone to take even the phoenix as a harbinger of doom, and even the Romans' native prophetic apparatus, the Sibylline books, is grossly misunderstood in ways that threaten the longevity of Rome's religious traditions. In a society so lacking in religious memory, it is not surprising that predictions made about the future are typically incorrect: when Tiberius leaves Rome, the collapse of the amphitheater at Fidenae and the fire in Rome are interpreted as omens, but erroneously (*Ann.* 4.64.1). People are too credulous about strange and terrible occurrences. All this shows the difficulty of getting prediction right, a problem which will be endemic in the rest of the *Annals*. Tacitus' observations on astrology, too, point to this difficulty. Oddly enough, the only true prophets are Thrasyllus and Tiberius himself, and Thrasyllus predicts only his own demise. Only Tiberius can foresee who will reign in the future, or what kind of *princeps* Caligula will be. This uncomfortably contrasts with Tiberius' failure to choose his own successor, and with his dubious relationship with Germanicus, another potential successor. This particular means of foresight, Tacitus implies, is not particularly helpful, since it cannot change the course of events to improve the outcome for Rome.

So at the point of Tiberius' death, his subjects are at a loss when it comes to understanding how the religious failings of the past twenty-three years will affect the future; and similarly, the emperor himself, increasingly prophetic in his final years, understands what will happen but does not try to change it. The wrath of the gods, instead of being signified to humans through prodigies,

⁸¹ Cf. Klaassen 2014, 233.

remains unknown and unpropitiated. And interwoven amongst these significant passages on astrology, fate, and doom, are further reminders of what the Romans have been doing wrong. The episode of the Sibylline books looks back in its subject matter to the early years of Tiberius' reign, and the differences between the two incidents show how far Rome has slipped. Tiberius' reliance on the precedent of Augustus reinforces the problematic nature of that precedent: too often in the Tiberian hexad, Augustus has been an excuse to disregard the weight of past tradition, which should be the best guide in cultic matters. This is a bracing reminder of the changes that the principate as a system of government has made to Roman cultic memory: one-man rule leads to amnesia.

If Tacitus' words about *deum ira* from the beginning of *Annals* 4 continue to reverberate throughout the rest of the hexad, so too does Tiberius' Spanish temple speech (4.37–8), with its focus not only on the most appropriate way to honor living members of the Imperial family, but also, and particularly, on the issue of memory and posthumous reputation. The Senate has clearly gone off the rails, though in opposite directions, in how it wishes to commemorate Livia and Agrippina. The ritual commemoration of Agrippina's death with sacrifices to Jupiter is a gruesome reminder of the sinister blend of cult and murder in Titus Sabinus' trial. Flattery characterizes the Senate's wish to provide Livia with cultic commemoration, but when Messalinus jokes about her status as a mortal after Tiberius refuses that commemoration, it turns out to be no laughing matter. Similarly, Terentius' speech at his trial indicts Tiberius (though in an obsequious way) for encouraging the "worship" of Sejanus. Both Sejanus and Livia are people who in life received cultic honors, and Messalinus and Terentius serve to point out the inconsistency in how they are to be remembered after their deaths. This is a hole into which the Roman people has dug itself, but with no small help from the emperor.

It is Tiberius himself who comes sharply into focus when the commemoration of Augustus, cultic and otherwise, comes up for discussion. His failure to dedicate Augustus' temple suggests the insincerity of his vaunted commitment to the cult of his predecessor, but linking that episode via juxtaposition to Tiberius' prophetic remarks about Caligula allows Tacitus to make a powerful connection between emperor cult and the disaster which seems in store (whether fated or not) for Julio-Claudian Rome. Tiberius seems reluctant to see Augustus commemorated with cult, but erroneously assumes that leaving the way open for a successor he already knows will be a bad ruler and will die at the hands of an assassin, throwing the dynasty into crisis, is a better way to ensure Augustus' posthumous reputation. The interweaving of these different factors—Imperial cult, musings on fate, and a look ahead to the next dynasty—creates a strong impression that the wrath of the gods Tacitus told us about at the beginning of *Annals* 4 is both deserved and ineluctable.

Claudius and the Failure of Tradition

6.1 INTRODUCTION: WHAT WE HAVE LOST

If our task so far has been to trace religious material through Tacitus' narrative and consider its significance and impact within the structure of that narrative, the massive rupture in the text of the *Annals* after the end of the Tiberian hexad makes several things difficult to assess as we move forward into the Claudian and Neronian material. We are missing Tacitus' observations on the handover of power to Caligula, and Tiberius' failure to earn posthumous deification; Tacitus' interpretation of that incident would have shed further important light on the question of cultic commemoration for an emperor whose complicated relationship with his own cult was brought increasingly into focus over the course of *Annals* 1–6. We also are deprived of the chance to know whether, and if so how, the *deum ira* and *saevitia* flagged up at the beginning of *Annals* 4 continued to manifest themselves after Tiberius' demise. Would Tacitus have wanted his reader to think that the gods' wrath was particular to Tiberius' reign, or would he have continued to pepper his account with reminders of it, or even with prodigies signifying its continuance, indicating he wanted us to see divine wrath as a broader problem that continued to afflict Julio-Claudian Rome ever since that fatal turning point in *Ann.* 4.1? To these questions we shall never know the answer.

It is difficult to understand religious material in what we have of *Annals* 11–12 without knowing how Tacitus handled similar questions in *Annals* 7–10. It is unfortunate that it is Caligula whose reign is missing; the lacuna poses a particular difficulty given that emperor's alleged interest, notorious in both ancient sources and modern scholarship, in wanting to be treated as a god in his own lifetime. It is perhaps interesting, if ultimately moot, to speculate on what Tacitus would have made of the reports of Caligula's eccentric behavior preserved in Dio and Suetonius: depicting himself as a rival of Jupiter, appearing in the temple of Castor and Pollux between the gods'

statues, and dressing as various gods and goddesses.¹ It is not certain Tacitus would have mentioned these things, given his avoidance of other religious material (for example, prodigies) that parallel accounts of Tiberius did include in their discussions. Gradel's recent reassessment of the evidence suggests that the extreme nature of Caligula's behavior has been overplayed in the ancient sources, and that Caligula's contemporaries perhaps did not view his acts as outrageous to the extent that modern scholars do.² The question of whether Caligula was worshipped as a god in Rome during his own lifetime is, however, worth considering. Both Dio and Suetonius mention a temple Caligula had built for himself in Rome.³ As Gradel has convincingly argued, this was in all likelihood a private temple rather than one voted by the Senate that would therefore make Caligula a part of the state cult.⁴ Yet certain aspects of the way Suetonius talks about the temple are suggestive. He highlights the enthusiastic reception of this cult by Rome's senatorial class: "All the wealthiest men obtained the offices of the priesthood in turn, with greatest ambition and very high bids" (*Calig. 22.3 magisteria sacerdotii ditissimus quisque et ambitione et licitatione maxima vicibus comparabant*). This rush to join the priesthood may have been motivated by genuine acceptance of cult as a way of conceptualizing the emperor, as Gradel argues; but it could also have been prompted by fear of Caligula or a desire to flatter him.⁵ Either way, it is possible to see how Tacitus, if he discussed this cult of Caligula in Rome, might have integrated it into the larger narrative of emperor cult, cultic commemoration of living emperors, and non-cultic worshipful behavior that he constructed over the course of the Tiberian hexad. It is possible to see a similar impulse to what Tacitus describes, for example, in the cult acts aimed at Sejanus (*Ann. 4.2.3, 4.74.2*): Tacitus never suggested that their motivation was not genuine, and they were a powerful indicator of the ways the discourse and ritual apparatus of the Imperial cult was being applied ever more inappropriately. The notion that would-be priests of Caligula had to pay a fee

¹ On Jupiter, see Joseph. *AJ* 19.11; Suet. *Calig.* 22.4; Dio 59.28.2, 6–7; see also Simpson 1981, 505. On Castor and Pollux, see Suet. *Calig.* 22.2. On dress, see Philo *Leg.* 78; Suet. *Calig.* 52; Dio 59. 26.6–8.

² See Gradel 2002, 146–9. Gradel (2002, 154–5) also asserts, on the basis of an Italian–Scandinavian excavation in the Forum, that no alterations were made to the temple of Castor that could correspond to what the sources describe. A 2003 excavation, however, found evidence that may support an extension of the palace up to the podium of the temple, undertaken by Caligula. See the personal webpage of Andrew Wilson, who was involved in the excavation (<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~corp0057/>, accessed 15 June 2016); the results have not yet been published.

³ Suet. *Calig.* 22.3; Dio 59.28.2–3. Seneca's and Philo's contemporary accounts do not mention the temple, perhaps indicating that Dio used Suetonius as a source for the story, or that both relied on a common source (Simpson 1981, 491).

⁴ Gradel 2002, 150–4. Dio actually claims that there were two temples, one voted by the Senate, but Gradel argues that that building, if it truly was voted, was never built.

⁵ Gradel 2002, 155–6. Cf. Wardle 1994, 213.

to join the cult perhaps shows a concern about the monetization of priesthoods that is also reflected in Tacitus' observation on money given to Vestal Virgins (4.16.4).⁶ There, the need for cash bribes indicated Romans' lack of concern for these offices that were crucial conduits of cultic memory. Caligula's priests, on the other hand, are throwing away their fortunes to be part of a new effort in cultic commemoration that is problematic in its motivation as well as its object.

Dio also suggests that there may be reason for thinking that there were differences in how Caligula, as compared with Tiberius, responded to suggestions of worship in the provinces. He reports that Caligula ordered a *τέμενος* to be built for himself in Miletus: "He said that it was because Artemis had already taken Ephesus, Augustus had already taken Pergamum, and Tiberius had already taken Smyrna" (59.28.1 *λόγῳ μὲν εἰπὼν ὅτι τὴν μὲν Ἐφεσον ἢ Ἄρτεμις τὴν δὲ Πέργαμον ὁ Αὐγούστος τὴν δὲ Σμύρναν ὁ Τιβέριος προκατελήφασιν*). Caligula cites the temple of Augustus in Pergamum as a precedent for his own temple, just as Tacitus' Tiberius did (*Ann.* 4.37.3); but now Tiberius' temple in Smyrna (cf. *Ann.* 4.56) serves as a precedent in its own right. That use of precedent suggests something similar to what Tacitus has shown us in the Tiberian hexad: Imperial cult expands ever outward, and each new innovation, while it can be rationalized in the present moment, could form the basis for something more extreme in the future. Whatever Tacitus made of Caligula, the tradition uniformly suggests that he was no demurring Tiberius when it came to cultic honors. Probably his attitude to emperor cult was represented as rather (if not very) different, and might have provided evidence for Tacitus of the further creep toward a universal Imperial desire for cultic commemoration.

Against this putative background, Tacitus' description of Claudius' principate may have either blended in, or stood out in sharp relief. If Tacitus presented Caligula's reign as an escalation and intensification of rhetoric (present from the very beginning of the *Annals*) that increasingly equated the emperor with the gods, *Annals* 11 and 12 are very different: Claudius is the least-worshipped *princeps* in the extant portions of the *Annals*. This may be because we are missing Tacitus' accounts of events like the foundation of a temple to Claudius in Camulodunum in Britain, whose existence is mentioned in the account of Boudicca's revolt (*Ann.* 14.32.4).⁷ If Tacitus' Caligula was impious (even if not as outrageously so as Dio's and Suetonius'), Tacitus has

⁶ Dio 59.28.5 gives the entrance fee as 10 million sesterces—an outrageous sum—but also suggests few were interested in joining, since priests included Claudius, Caligula's wife Caesonia, and his horse Incitatus (Hurley 1993, 89).

⁷ Surviving documentary evidence suggests that Claudius refused divine honors much as Tiberius had. Compare his letters to the Alexandrians (Smallwood 1967 no. 370 = Sherck 1988 no. 44) and Thasians (Pouilloux 1954 no. 179) with Tiberius' famous letter to the city of Gytheum in Laconia of AD 15 (*SEG* xi.922–3 = Ehrenberg and Jones 1955, no. 102b = Sherck 1988, no. 31). See also Momigliano 1987, 29.

perhaps chosen to represent Claudius as a reaction against this escalation, a welcome respite before Nero's gross impieties. On the other hand, Tacitus may have minimized Caligula's excesses, creating a more gradual progression of increasing impiety from Tiberius to Nero. The question is ultimately unanswerable, but must be borne in mind when assessing what is distinctive about Tacitus' account of Claudius' principate.

Whatever has happened in the intervening books, Tacitus' picture of Claudius in the area of religion contrasts rather sharply with Tiberius' in some ways, while continuing to exhibit its salient characteristics in others. Claudius is far more actively concerned with cultic memory and its preservation. While Tiberius on several occasions does come out in favor of preserving Rome's ancient religious traditions, these interventions were frequently problematized based on their perceived sincerity, or on the way that memory-based argumentation was used (or not used). Claudius, on the other hand, seems more genuine in his attention to, and sometimes revivals of, ancient customs, apparently acting primarily on his own initiative. This active approach is a stark contrast not only with Claudius' passive character in other respects, but also with Tiberius' general practice of intervening only reactively, in response to a request from the Senate or other Imperial subjects.⁸ Claudius' revivalism shows that even after Tiberius' failures and Caligula's excesses, Rome can still produce a *princeps* more interested than his predecessors in maintaining Rome's traditional relationship with the gods. But *Annals* 11 and 12 also bring deterioration. Claudius' antiquarian proclivities, while positive in their own right, occupy his attention at inopportune times, while his wives twist religious rites, see Roman citizens executed, and even appropriate divine honors for themselves. The discourse of emperor cult is rarely applied to Claudius, but even this is not entirely positive. And despite his best efforts at religious correctness, Claudius' principate is the first in the extant *Annals* to be marked by prodigies, direct communication from the gods showing the consequences of the Julio-Claudians' religious behavior and forecasting further decline under Nero.

6.2 TRIALS AND CULTIC MEMORY FOR A NEW REIGN: CLAUDIUS THE CENSOR

We have also lost Tacitus' account of Claudius' accession to the throne and the first six years of his reign, but when the text resumes, an incident

⁸ e.g. *Ann.* 3.71.2–3, responding to a request from Maluginensis; 4.12, responding to a proposal from Caninius Gallus.

involving the interpretation of dreams very quickly sets the tone: a focus on the destructiveness of Claudius' wives, and an atmosphere of gloom that looks ahead to the end of his principate. Messalina has evidently been responsible for executing Claudius' own son-in-law Cn. Pompeius Magnus, and in her next move against Valerius Asiaticus, she is motivated by a desire for his gardens and, implicitly, by jealousy of Poppaea, with whom she accuses him of committing adultery.⁹ Tacitus highlights Claudius' ignorance and passivity: he complies without questioning Messalina's accusation (*Ann.* 11.1.3), and after her execution even asks Poppaea's husband about his wife's absence from the dinner table (11.2.2). Further casualties of Messalina's deadly wrath are the brothers Petra, two equestrians who are supposed to have allowed Poppaea and Mnester to use their house for liaisons (11.4.1), but the charge that is actually levied against them is rather different:

verum nocturnae quietis species alteri obiecta, tamquam vidisset Claudium spicea corona evinctum spicis retro conversis, eaque imagine gravitatem annonae praedixisset. quidam pampineam coronam albentibus foliis visam atque ita interpretatum tradidere, vergente autumno mortem principis ostendi. illud haud ambigitur, qualicumque insomnio ipsi fratrique perniciem adlatam. (11.4.2)

(But a vision during nighttime rest was the charge against one of them: that he had seen Claudius wearing a crown of wheat-ears turned upside down, and that he had predicted a crisis in the grain supply based upon that image. Certain people have related that it was an ivy crown with white leaves that was seen, and that he interpreted it as portending the death of the *princeps* as autumn turned. But there is no disagreement on this point: because of a dream of some kind, destruction was visited upon him and upon his brother.)

Tacitus does not say whether the alleged dream truly predicted future events, or indeed whether the Petra brother actually had the dream at all.¹⁰ The two possible versions of the dream and his alleged interpretations of them are for Tacitus another good example of the ambiguities, and the dangers, inherent in predicting the future. The wheat-ear crown, associated with Ceres, was also worn by the Arval Brethren, and was a symbol of office that would only be relinquished upon death; since Claudius was (since as early as 23/22 BC) a member of the Arvales, the image of a wheat-ear crown that has perhaps been removed and replaced on his head upside down could be interpreted as signifying his own death, in addition to (or instead of) the less personalized

⁹ On events before the beginning of *Annals* 11, see Malloch 2013, 1. Poppaea (apparently Messalina's rival for the affections of Mnester the pantomime), not Asiaticus, is probably her primary target (Malloch 2013, 51).

¹⁰ *Tamquam* is equivalent to an accusative and infinitive construction giving the dream's contents (Draeger 1874, 72; Furneaux 1907, 5; Woodcock 1939, 30; Koestermann 1968, 68). The construction is particularly common "to express a charge unvouched for by the author" (Malloch 2013, 458).

interpretation of the famine that the Petra brother is supposed to have made.¹¹ A similar upside-down wreath allegedly foretold Brutus' demise shortly before Philippi.¹² These signs suggest doom for Claudius himself, but the Petra brother allegedly thought it referred to Rome's grain supply. And despite Tacitus' hedging *tamquam*, this interpretation is in fact borne out later in his narrative when a famine occurs in AD 51 (*Ann.* 12.43). As for the second version of the dream, where the crown is of ivy rather than wheat, notwithstanding the possible significations of those pale ivy leaves,¹³ there is once again a resonance with Tacitus' subsequent account: in the next year, the pretender Silius will impersonate Bacchus in an ivy crown as one of his last acts in life (11.31.2). This time, then, the correspondence is not the one that the Petra brother allegedly proposed: interpreted this way, the ivy crown is a herald of death, but not for Claudius, and not as autumn turned to winter, but at the season's height (11.31.2 *adulto autumno*).¹⁴ Tacitus does not specify which (if either) version of the dream the Petra brother actually had, thus allowing the reader progressing through the narrative to draw conclusions relating either to the famine or to Silius. There is a significant space of time between the dream and either of the two events (the famine would not occur for four more years, Claudius' death for seven), so a good memory is required to make either connection; this shows the difficulties of interpreting warnings in dreams. There is also the injustice of the episode: two brothers are condemned by one dream. It is possible that the dreamer's brother helped disseminate the interpretation,¹⁵ but Tacitus does not explicitly say so. The ring composition effect of Tacitus' final declaration emphasizes the charge's unjustness: why should anyone be charged for having a dream, and how much less should someone be charged because someone *else* has had a dream?¹⁶ Under Claudius, dreams are taken with deadly seriousness, and perhaps Tacitus implies that Roman aristocrats should avoid dream interpretation if they want to remain alive.¹⁷ Claudius himself, although somewhat distant from the action of this episode, is not blameless, for Tacitus notes his complicity in creating an environment where such accusations will continue to thrive: "After that, Suillius was constant and savage in accusing defendants,

¹¹ For the Arvales and the *corona spicea*, see Pliny *HN* 18.6. On Claudius as an Arval Brother, see Rüpke 2008, 618. For the famine interpretation as "impersonal," see Davies 2004, 168.

¹² Plut. *Brut.* 39.3; App. *B Civ.* 4.134; Dio 47.40.7–8 applies the portent to Cassius, not Brutus.

¹³ White leaves "convey the idea of decay and death" (Furneaux 1907, 5; cf. Koestermann 1967, 34). Dreaming of wearing such a crown was most often a bad sign, portending imprisonment, sickness, or beheading (Artem. *Oneir.* 1.77; see also Harris-McCoy 2012, 460).

¹⁴ See Malloch 2013, 434 on the date of the *vindemia* that was the setting for Silius' Bacchic costume (probably October or earlier).

¹⁵ So Furneaux 1907, 5–6.

¹⁶ Cf. Koestermann 1967, 34.

¹⁷ Davies 2004, 168; cf. Harris 2009, 189. Suet. *Claud.* 37 describes an anonymous man put to death after his rival dreamed he had assassinated Claudius, and suggests that something similar occurred with Silanus (see further Hurley 2001, 215–16).

and there were many rivals for his defiance; for the *princeps* had revealed the means for depredation by drawing all the duties of the laws and of the magistrates into himself” (11.5.1 *Continuus inde et saevus accusandis reis Suillius, multique audaciae eius aemuli; nam cuncta legum et magistratuum munia in se trahens princeps materiam praedandi patefecerat*). The condemnation of the Petra brothers invites Suillius to be *saevus* in future cases; the savagery that Tacitus announced in his account of events twenty-four years earlier (*Ann.* 4.1.1) has not abated. There is a reminiscence of another reign as well: Tacitus repeats a phrase he first used to describe how Augustus “drew the duties of Senate, magistrates, and laws into himself” (1.2.1 *munia senatus magistratuum legum in se trahere*) after Actium. The principate has long caused everything to be concentrated into one man’s hands; combined with the difficulties inherent in interpreting dreams, this fact still has deadly consequences.

In the atmosphere of injustice and gloom surrounding these dreams, however, some of Claudius’ actions strike a rather different chord from anything we have heard thus far in the (extant) *Annals*. We see him celebrating the Secular Games, reviving the college of haruspices, and holding the censorship. Taken together, these three actions are a powerful testament to Claudius’ concern with the past, and particularly with keeping alive, or bringing back to life, some of Rome’s oldest cultic traditions. It is unclear how far the office of the censor, which Claudius held in AD 47–8, is directly related to these religious revivals; some have seen both of these as part of his censorial duties, but it may be that we are only to think of Claudius as fulfilling his role as censor in the chapters where that role is specifically highlighted (i.e. *Ann.* 11.13–14 and 25.2–5), and that the Secular Games and revival of the haruspices were performed by Claudius in different roles although these events occurred chronologically within the space of his censorship.¹⁸ The censorship is deeply bound up with Roman tradition. It is a Republican office, one Augustus had not held and which would not be held again after Domitian; Claudius’ revival of the censorship is thus a powerful attempt to connect Rome with its pre-Imperial past.¹⁹ The censorship is also intimately connected with cultic memory. Each censor ended his office by holding a ceremony (*lustrum*) involving the *suovetaurilia* sacrifice;²⁰ this rite, as Lintott notes, “shows that more was at stake than the mechanical tasks of counting and

¹⁸ Krauss 1930, 104–6. Malloch 2013, 183–4, 231 believes that Claudius was acting as *princeps* rather than as censor in his revival of the haruspices and celebration of the Secular Games. Seif 1973, 77–8; Ryan 1993, 615; and Osgood 2011, 154, 156, however, see the haruspices as part of his censorship.

¹⁹ Malloch 2013, 208. Augustus performed a census in 29 BC but did not actually hold the censorship (Cooley 2009, 139–40; see also Suolahti 1963, 501–6).

²⁰ See Ogilvie 1961. Cf. *Ann.* 11.25.5, on which see §6.2, pp. 251–2.

assessment of property: the ranking of citizens and the assessment of their moral worth has a particular point as a preliminary to a purification.”²¹

Yet Claudius’ censorship is not wholly positive. Tacitus says that Claudius’ focus on his censorial duties makes him ignorant of an important development in his marriage: Messalina’s affair with Silius, seen as a potential rival for the emperorship (*Ann.* 11.13.1 *matrimonii sui ignarus et munia censoria usurpans*). So while Claudius’ focus on his censorship is laudable from the point of view of cultural memory, Tacitus implies that this focus is ill-timed, symptomatic of Claudius’ dangerous tunnel-vision.²² That will prove to be all too typical of Claudius’ other attempts at revivalism, particularly those that involve cult or ritual. In the short term, the discussions of the Secular Games and the revival of the college of haruspices are also somehow undermined, preventing the reader from taking them as a completely positive example of the kind of engagement with Roman traditions that was missing under Tiberius.

Claudius’ celebration of the *Ludi Saeculares* shows a spirit of revivalism similar to his restoration of the censorship, and also to the large program of renewal of which Augustus’ celebration of the *ludi* had been a part.²³ The way Tacitus introduces the games invites the reader to think not only of Augustus, but also of the post-Julio-Claudian future:

Isdem consulibus ludi saeculares octingentesimo post Romam conditam, quarto et sexagesimo, quam Augustus ediderat, spectati sunt. utriusque principis rationes praetermitto, satis narratas libris quibus res imperatoris Domitiani composui. (*Ann.* 11.11.1)

(Under the same consuls, the Secular Games were watched, in the 800th year since Rome’s founding, and the 64th since the games which Augustus had given. I pass over the calculation systems of each *princeps*, which are sufficiently narrated in the books in which I wrote about the affairs of the commander Domitian.)

Unusually, Tacitus gives an *ab urbe condita* date for the Secular Games, presumably to draw attention to the question of counting systems, since Claudius’ rationale in holding the games this year was that it had been eight *saecula* since Rome’s foundation.²⁴ But there are further resonances to the expression. Normally, historians give dates in terms of consular years, so dating from Rome’s foundation is a marked way of marking time and indicates that Tacitus is charting some significant development.²⁵ Furthermore, anniversaries are

²¹ Lintott 1999, 116.

²² Cf. Suolahti 1963, 507–8.

²³ Osgood 2011, 153–4. For the sources for Claudius’ celebration of the games, see Pighi 1941, 76–8.

²⁴ Malloch 2013, 178–9; see also Momigliano 1961, 89–90 n. 14.

²⁵ Feeney 2007, 141–2. For this phenomenon in Livy, see Pinsent 1988, 3–4; Oakley 1998, 191–2.

sometimes connected with disaster: the Sibylline books predicted Rome's destruction at various significant anniversaries, new *saecula* were attended by prodigies, and it was prophesied that Rome would be destroyed 900 years after its foundation.²⁶ So while Tacitus' *ab urbe condita* date for the Secular Games indicates that they are momentous, the reader may also wonder whether they are somehow ominous. The reference to Augustus, in addition to having a similarly practical explanation, implicitly invites the reader to compare Claudius with Augustus and to consider, perhaps, the decline in Roman cultic memory that has resulted from the institution of the principate. Mentioning Domitian simultaneously directs the reader's mind forward, through the civil wars of AD 68–9 and beyond the good years under Vespasian and Titus to the reign of that monstrous emperor.²⁷ If the 800th anniversary of Rome makes the reader think about cycles and the passage of time, Augustus and Domitian bookend an important cycle, taking us from the beginning of the principate and all its ills through two dynasties to a time of horror. Nothing Tacitus says explicitly makes us think that Rome is facing imminent destruction; the problem is longer-term, and even Claudius' Secular Games, an attempt to ensure the gods' favor in the future,²⁸ will not change that larger trajectory. Tacitus' presentation of the games minimizes the opportunity for negative judgments, both by refusing to describe the calculation of the games' date (which would have required him to explicitly state that Claudius used a different calculation system from Augustus and that his games could therefore be attacked as invalid), and by omitting any mention of the ominous phoenix that allegedly appeared in conjunction with the games.²⁹ But they cannot be entirely positive, either.

Tacitus' report of the Secular Games also indicates a shorter-term problem that will impact *Annals* 11–13: tensions between Britannicus and the future emperor Nero. The two come into focus during Tacitus' description of the *ludicrum Troiae* (*Ann.* 11.11.2), the only ritual of Claudius' Secular Games described in any detail, and also the first time in the *Annals* where the two princes are explicitly compared.³⁰ Claudius is present in his official capacity

²⁶ Potter 1994, 99–101; Davies 2004, 217; Dio 57.18.3–5. On anniversaries, see §5.3, p. 220, and references there cited.

²⁷ This is not to say that Tacitus wished to cast aspersions on Domitian's celebration of the games (see Malloch 2013, 180, and §0.2, pp. 14–15); only that by mentioning Domitian alongside Augustus, Tacitus invites the reader to think about the beginnings, and catastrophic endings, of dynasties.

²⁸ Feeney 1998, 29. See also the inscribed edicts on Augustus' celebration of the games (*CIL* 6.32323), containing frequent prayers for safety, good fortune, and divine favor for the Roman people (e.g. lines 90–9).

²⁹ For negative judgments of Claudius' games, see Pliny *HN* 7.159; Suet. *Claud.* 21.2 (cf. Seif 1973, 64). On the issue of calculating a date for Secular Games, see Beard et al. 1998, i.205–6. For the phoenix, see Poe 1984, 60; Keitel 1999; and §5.6.

³⁰ Seif 1973, 65. The way Nero is identified as “L. Domitius, who was in due course admitted via adoption into the command and the name ‘Nero’” (*L. Domitius adoptione mox in imperium et cognomentum Neronis adscitus*) suggests he had not been mentioned before (Furieux 1907, 16; Walker 1952, 80 n. 1; Malloch 2013, 189).

(11.11.2 *sedente Claudio*), but not participating in the *ludicrum* (an activity for the young), or even officially presiding (since this would have been done by the praetor, which Claudius was not).³¹ The only ritual Tacitus describes, then, is one in which the emperor does not personally take part. This somewhat undermines the spirit of revivalism and cultic memory that lies behind the decision to put on the Secular Games in the first place. There is also irony inherent in the fact that the *plebs* prefers Nero to Britannicus while Claudius is visibly holding court and probably hoping that his subjects would draw a connection between himself, Britannicus, and the promise of the new *saeculum*.³² The performance of this ancient ritual makes Tacitus' characters look forward to the distant future as they watch the two boys on parade: "The *plebs*' keener favor for Domitius was received like a portent" (11.11.2 *favor plebis acrior i<n> Domitium loco praesagii acceptus est*). It is unclear who makes the interpretation about Nero (Claudius himself, or the members of his court?) or indeed what exactly Nero's prominence is thought to predict. Presumably his eventual accession to the principate is what Tacitus wishes the reader to think of, even if observers at the time cannot have known that that would come to pass. Interpreting Nero's prominence as a sign of the future is significant in the context of the Secular Games, which were traditionally inspired by *actual* prodigies, such as diseases and lightning strikes, thought to portend future disaster.³³ These Secular Games make people think about the future, but not in the way they would have in the past: actual portents count for less than popularity. But unbeknownst to them, Nero's future position will be disastrous for Rome. His popularity, then, does in fact portend bad things for Rome, just as a true *praesagium* would, even if no one at the time could have predicted it.

The *plebs*' favor for Nero is reinforced by a rumor that he was guarded by snakes in his infancy:

vulgabaturque adfuisse infantiae eius dracones in modum custodum, fabulosa et externis miraculis adsimilata: nam ipse, haudquaquam sui detractor, unam omnino anguem in cubiculo visam narrare solitus est. verum inclinatio populi supererat ex memoria Germanici, cuius illa reliqua suboles virilis.

(*Ann.* 11.11.3–12.1)

(And it was revealed that during his infancy serpents had been present in the manner of guards—this was mythical, made to resemble foreign miracles. For he himself, never his own detractor, used to say that just one snake had been seen in his bedroom. But the people's inclination endured from the memory of Germanicus, of whom this was the last remaining male offspring.)

Tacitus' wording suggests that people like Nero in spite of this false modesty, as if the foreign-sounding story of two guardian snakes is difficult even for his

³¹ Malloch 2013, 187, who translates *sedente Claudio* as "in the presence of Claudius." Cf. *OLD* s.v. *sedeo* 3, "to sit in an official capacity (as magistrate, judge, etc.)."

³² Cf. Malloch 2013, 175, 187.

³³ Poe 1984, 59–60. Cf. Koestermann 1967, 49.

supporters to swallow. Tacitus' assessment of the story's validity recalls his judgment of the phoenix (6.28.6 *haec incerta et fabulosis aucta*), where he seeks to separate the core truth of the phoenix's existence from the accretion of exaggerated stories about its behavior. But this time it is not Tacitus, but Nero himself, playing the part of the correcting historian, who intervenes in popular gossip to reveal the truer (if no less self-aggrandizing) version. But this particular variety of intervention seems designed to make Nero's story into something arguably more "mythical:" by reducing the number of snakes from two to one, Nero scripts for himself a storyline that had been deployed for Augustus, Scipio Africanus, and Alexander the Great, all of whose mothers were said to have conceived their sons after intercourse with a god in the guise of a snake.³⁴ Like Scipio, whom Livy says encouraged this false story, the characteristically self-aggrandizing Nero is similarly unwilling to dispel the rumor entirely.³⁵ What he misses, however, and what the people miss too, is that in his particular case the story about Alexander's divine-snake parentage, the urtext of the later snake stories about Scipio and Augustus, evokes a rather grimmer connection. Germanicus, still strong in everyone's memory, was also compared to Alexander the Great (*Ann.* 2.73.1–2); both of these men, who died young, could be seen to presage Nero's early and disastrous death.³⁶ So both Nero and the people are all too right to place him in the same category as Germanicus (and, implicitly, Alexander), but not for the reasons they suppose. As Malloch points out, this numinous snake also prefigures a prodigy that will occur in Nero's own principate when a woman gives birth to a snake after Nero kills Agrippina (14.12.2), so that the paradigm is reversed, and "Nero, not his divine father, becomes the snake, the monster...that killed his mother."³⁷ These dubious snakes give the reader an early sense that something will not be quite right about Nero, even if that premonition will not be fulfilled for some books. Instead of expiating bad events in the past, as was traditional, Claudius' Secular Games imply that worse is to come for Nero, for Britannicus, and for Rome as a whole. Yet Claudius himself seems untouched by these concerns as he presides over this momentous event.

In reviving the college of the haruspices, Claudius will appear similarly detached despite his demonstrated understanding of the principles of Roman cultic memory:

Rettulit deinde ad senatum super collegio haruspicum, ne vetustissima Italiae disciplina per desidiam exolesceret: saepe adversis rei publicae temporibus

³⁴ O'Gorman 2000, 169; Malloch 2013, 192, 196. For Augustus, see Suet. *Aug.* 94; for Scipio, see Livy 26.19.7–8; for Alexander, see Plut. *Alex.* 2–3. On the three snake stories and their history, see Ogden 2009, 137–41.

³⁵ See Levene 1993, 19; Malloch 2013, 195–6.

³⁶ Malloch 2013, 193–4.

³⁷ Malloch 2013, 194. See also Vessey 1971, 392, comparing Virg. *Aen.* 7.346ff. For other examples of snake-related prodigies, see Krauss 1930, 113–315.

accitos, quorum monitu redintegratas caerimonias et in posterum rectius habitas; primoresque Etruriae sponte aut patrum Romanorum impulsu retinuisse scientiam et in familias propagasse: quod nunc segnius fieri publica circa bonas artes socordia, et quia externae superstitiones valescant. et laeta quidem in praesens omnia, sed benignitati deum gratiam referendam, ne ritus sacrorum inter ambigua culti per prospera oblitterarentur. factum ex eo senatus consultum, viderent pontifices quae retinenda firmandaque haruspicum. (*Ann.* 11.15)

(Next, he made a motion to the Senate about the college of the haruspices, in order that that most ancient discipline of Italy should not fall out of use through idleness. He noted that they had often been summoned at adverse moments for the state, and that it was thanks to their warnings that ceremonies had been renewed and maintained more correctly in the future. The leaders of Etruria had held on to this knowledge and handed it down to their families, either out of their own free will or at the prompting of the Roman fathers; but now this was happening more half-heartedly thanks to public inaction in the realm of the liberal arts, and because foreign superstitions were strong. Everything was blessed, to be sure, for the present, but they ought to give thanks to the kindness of the gods by ensuring that the observances of the sacred rites that had been preserved during doubtful times should not be obliterated during prosperous ones. In accordance with this, a decree of the Senate was made that the *pontifices* should consider which of the haruspices' practices should be retained or confirmed.)

Both Tacitus *in propria persona* and Claudius himself seem to express a wish that the ancient *disciplina Etrusca*, which has survived for centuries, should continue to be studied and practiced.³⁸ But Claudius goes even further, explicitly linking the haruspices' art to the preservation of Rome's other religious traditions. Their *disciplina* is therefore both itself an important part of Roman cultic memory, since it has been practiced for so long, and a crucial guarantor of that same cultic memory, since the warnings of the haruspices help the Romans to maintain the purity and continuity of their religious traditions. He also asserts that the ideal way to thank the gods for the present good state of things in Rome is to make sure that these traditions continue to be preserved: Claudius knows the gods will not stay happy if the rites are neglected. Claudius' insightfulness is a striking contrast with everything we have seen in the Tiberian *Annals*; we can imagine that Claudius, who recognizes that the gods like it when the Romans preserve religious traditions (especially those governing the interpretation of prodigies, the haruspices' precise area of expertise),³⁹ would never have prohibited the Sibylline books

³⁸ Grimal 1989a, 173 notes that *ne vetustissima Italiae disciplina per desidiam exolesceret* represents Tacitus' judgment and is not part of Claudius' speech. See also Grimal 1989b, 108; Griffin 1990, 484–5.

³⁹ MacBain 1982, 126.

from being consulted (cf. *Ann.* 1.76), let the augurs participate in games for Livia's health (3.64), or allowed the *flamen Dialis* to be selected from the offspring of a non-confarreate marriage (4.16). At last we have a *princeps* committed to preserving the cultic traditions that will keep Rome alive, by ensuring that the haruspices' skills are passed down to future generations and reinscribed in cultic memory.

Even so, Claudius' reading of the situation is flawed. He deplores the neglect of the *disciplina Etrusca* in the current age of prosperity, and he is certainly not the first to note that people care less about traditional forms of divination when conditions seem good, so his lament is traditional too.⁴⁰ But it is hard to imagine how he can think Rome is "blessed" or experiencing "the kindness of the gods" in a society where so much is going wrong. If Claudius sees the contrast between *adversa tempora* and present happiness as one between war and peace, he may have some justification, given the successful installation of pro-Roman kings in Parthia and among the Cherusci.⁴¹ But the recent activities of Messalina speak to a very unpleasant state of affairs. As Osgood notes, "In alluding to present tranquillity Tacitus undoubtedly is setting up the great storm of Messalina's fall that was about to break" in the denouement of her affair with the ill-fated Silius, dragging many alleged adulterers down along with her (*Ann.* 11.35.3, 11.36.3),⁴² while the ignorant Claudius is preoccupied with his censorial duties (11.13.1). His revival of the haruspices, even if not technically part of those censorial duties,⁴³ arises from a similar spirit of revivalism. While Claudius' focus on reviving the college is laudable from the point of view of religious memory, Tacitus implies that this antiquarianism is ill-timed and not enough to ensure the well-being of the city that Claudius erroneously asserts.

Assuming that everything is going well is a flaw that Tacitus highlights elsewhere when discussing omens. The phrase *laeta quidem in praesens*, recalling Hor. *Carm.* 2.16.25–6 (*laetus in praesens animus quod ultra est/oderit curare*, "Let the mind that is happy for the present be reluctant to be concerned with what lies beyond"), emphasizes Claudius' short-sightedness.⁴⁴ While the original Horatian sentiment is positive, in Tacitus it reads pessimistically and, as Keitel notes, "underlines Claudius' insensitivity to the very real threats to the state in the present and near future."⁴⁵ The phrase also recalls Tacitus' description of the remains of sacrifices, visible at Cremona after

⁴⁰ Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.92 and 95, on the need to continue divination, including the *disciplina Etrusca*, during both war and peace. On the passages, see Wardle 2006, 325.

⁴¹ See Malloch 2013, 119.

⁴² Osgood 2011, 156.

⁴³ Cf. Ryan 1993, 615 n. 18.

⁴⁴ Furneaux 1907, 21; Koestermann 1967, 57; Keitel 1981, 211.

⁴⁵ Keitel 1981, 211. Cf. the similar observations of Vessey 1971, 394, who does not discuss the Horatian allusion. On the Horace passage, see Nisbet and Hubbard 1978, 266.

Otho's defeat, that had been made by the inhabitants before the battle as they wished Otho well, but which would earn them the hostility of the Vitellian troops after the fact: "These things, fortunate for the present, soon brought them destruction" (*Hist.* 2.70.2 *quae laeta in praesens mox perniciem ipsis fecere*). The phrase also recalls Tacitus' musings on the difficulties of interpreting signs at the beginning of the *Histories*, where the implication was that it was not always going to be easy to distinguish which were *laeta* and which were *tristia* (*Hist.* 1.3.2).⁴⁶ So even if the *princeps* himself does not realize the problem, the fact that Claudius' *laeta* is qualified by *in praesens* prepares us for the possibility of a similar reversal despite his attempt to preserve cultic memory.

Claudius' criticism of foreign worship is also misplaced and recalls the Tiberian expulsions of astrologers (*Ann.* 2.32.3), Jews, and worshippers of Isis (2.85.4). There, Tacitus implied that while such religious practices were inherently problematic, focusing attention on them rather than on the home-grown problems of religious flattery and cultic commemoration of Germanicus showed a lack of religious priorities in both emperor and Senate. While Claudius is right to want to preserve the skills of the haruspices, he perhaps misses the point in casting aspersions upon foreign religious practices while doing nothing about his own wife's problematic behavior. Here the misdirection does not so much highlight a conflict between foreign and native religious corruption (as in the Tiberian examples), but between religious corruption and savagery in the Imperial house.

The outcome of Claudius' proposal to the Senate is, like that of the asylum edict under Tiberius (*Ann.* 3.60–3), something of a narrative anticlimax: the Senate mandates the *pontifices* to investigate and decide what changes ought to be made, but we do not learn the outcome, and the issue is never revisited. This makes Claudius, surprisingly, look less effective in religious affairs than Tiberius, who successfully restrained the *fetiales* within their traditional remit (3.64.3–4) and prevented the *flamen Dialis* from violating his office's strict regulations (3.71.2–3). The college apparently *was* revived, since haruspices, not mentioned previously in the extant *Annals*, appear twice in the account of Nero's reign. So Tacitus' Claudius will not use the haruspices himself, despite the occurrence of two sets of prodigies later in his reign; what good, then, is his revival? Even when haruspices later are consulted, their advice will not always be taken: Nero listens to them (13.24.2), but the Pisonian conspirators do not (15.47.2). So as the reader proceeds through the text, Tacitus' own narrative will contradict Claudius' assertions. Despite Claudius' concern with preserving religious memory, the cultic specialists responsible for maintaining good relationships with the gods will not maintain the prominence he might have hoped.

⁴⁶ See §0.2, pp. 16–17, and Shannon 2014, 276–7.

The end of Claudius' censorship, just like its beginning, is problematically juxtaposed with his shambolic domestic life.⁴⁷ His counting of the citizens coincides with the chain of events ending in Messalina's death and his marriage to Agrippina:

condiditque lustrum, quo censa sunt civium quinquagies novies centena octoginta quattuor milia septuaginta duo. isque illi finis inscitiae erga domum suam fuit: haud multo post flagitia uxoris noscere ac punire adactus, ut deinde ardesceret in nuptias incestas. (*Ann.* 11.25.5)

(He conducted the lustral sacrifice in which 5,984,072 citizens were counted. And that was for him the end of his ignorance concerning his own house: not long afterward he was compelled to acknowledge and punish his wife's outrages, so that he could later burn for an incestuous marriage.)

Condere lustrum is a religious technical term used only of the *suovetaurilia* that ended a census.⁴⁸ By mentioning the *lustrum* specifically, Tacitus brings the censorship's connection with cultic memory into focus and emphasizes Claudius' active role in performing the traditional ritual, highlighting the mismatch between Claudius' two personae—the censor concerned with public morals, and the dupe unaware of immorality in his own house.⁴⁹ The *lustrum* that ended the census may be interpreted as symbolically marking the integration of the new citizen body that has just been counted, putting them under the protection of the gods until the next *lustrum*, and heralding the beginning of a new period of five years; for example, when Augustus performed the census, it apparently involved making vows to the gods that would be discharged at the next *lustrum* in exchange for five more years of peace.⁵⁰ But for Claudius, this new period will not be so promising, for Tacitus also flags up the end of his censorship as the moment that will set in motion his discovery of Messalina's affair with Silius, and his own ensuing marriage to his niece Agrippina. Tacitus' wording invites the reader to consider questions of fate or destiny. The final *ut*-clause is another "will of fate" purpose clause:⁵¹ just as he performs a traditional sacrifice at its proper time, Claudius also seals his own incestuous fate in a marriage that, as we shall see, has its own religious problems and that will end in Claudius' death at the hands of that wife. In the next chapter we will be told that Silius, in urging on Messalina in her desire for marriage, was possibly motivated by a "fatal madness" (11.26.1 *fatali*

⁴⁷ Malloch 2013, 391 notes the ring composition effect linking *Ann.* 11.25.5 with 11.13.1.

⁴⁸ Ogilvie 1961, 31; Malloch 2013, 389.

⁴⁹ Joshel 1997, 227; cf. Vessey 1971, 397; Keitel 1981, 210; O'Gorman 2000, 115.

⁵⁰ The *lustrum* has long been interpreted as a purificatory ritual, but is probably rather to be understood as apotropaic (Versnel 1975, 100–3) or as a way of defining a group (Versnel 1985, 146; *The SCRA* i.55–6). On Augustus, see Suet. *Aug.* 97 with Meyer 2004, 102 and Wardle 2014, 539. For the vows, see also Festus, p. 154 Müller; Gagé 1970, 47 n. 1.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ann.* 3.13.2 and 4.52.1, and see §3.2, p. 132.

vaecordia), and Claudius himself will later observe that “it was his fate to endure and then punish his wives’ outrages” (12.64.2 *fatale sibi ut coniugum flagitia ferret, dein puniret*).⁵² Completing a censorial sacrifice at the same time his ignorance ends perhaps implies that the resulting marriage will affect all the Roman citizens he has just counted. Even as Claudius himself proclaims that everything is going well for Rome and that the gods are being kindly, Tacitus gives the reader evidence to the contrary.

6.3 MESSALINA AND THE MISUSE OF RITUAL

Tacitus continues the emphasis on cultic memory that characterized Claudius’ censorship and other reforms in the denouement of Messalina’s story. The episode contains several important instances of ritual, some performed according to the traditional manner, some shockingly subversive, but all contributing to a sense that, however positive Claudius’ interest in cultic memory may be when compared with Tiberius’ incompetence, this will not be enough to set Rome back upon a proper footing with the gods.

This begins when Messalina marries Silius in a wedding ceremony while Claudius is absent from Rome: “Waiting no longer than it took for Claudius to set out for Ostia for the sake of a sacrifice, she celebrated all the rites of a wedding” (*Ann.* 11.26.3 *nec ultra exspectato, quam dum sacrificii gratia Claudius Ostiam proficisceretur, cuncta nuptiarum sollemnia celebrat*). Tacitus does not indicate that anything is wrong with the sacrifice itself, and Claudius’ concern with observing rites fits in with the relatively positive picture of Claudius as a defender of cultic memory that Tacitus has shown us so far. But given Messalina’s activities in his absence, Claudius would have done better *not* to sacrifice on this particular occasion.⁵³ In this regard, Claudius’ absence from Rome also recalls Tiberius’ use of ritual to cover up his withdrawal to Capri (4.57.1). Unlike Tiberius, for whom temple dedication was an excuse for departure rather than something in which he seemed to have a sincere interest, Claudius appears to be pursuing religious ritual sincerely, for its own sake, rather than as an excuse for his own nefarious purposes, but his absence from Rome is no less of a problem. If Tiberius’ problem was insincerity, Claudius’ is ineffectiveness. It is instructive to compare Tacitus’ text to the parallel account of Dio, who attributes Claudius’ visit to Ostia to a desire to inspect the grain supply (60.31.4), which makes Claudius look like an effective emperor taking care of a real problem. In Tacitus’ version, however, old-fashioned Claudius is

⁵² For the connection, see Malloch 2013, 392.

⁵³ Davies 2004, 197 n. 168.

obsessed with some unnamed sacrifice to a god who is not even identified, when he should be looking after cultic matters closer to home.⁵⁴

For a major problem with Claudius' absence from Rome is that it prevents him from putting a stop to perversions of religious ritual perpetrated by Messalina, in much the same way that Tiberius' absence from Rome left the way open for the perverted "sacrifice" of Titius Sabinus and worshipful treatment of Sejanus. Tacitus' description of Messalina's marriage rites with Silius as *sollemnia*, a word with religious overtones, contrasts the apparently normal and acceptable sacrifice Claudius performs in Ostia with Messalina's sham ritual in Rome.⁵⁵ As he enumerates the details of Messalina's bigamous wedding, Tacitus includes more obviously cultic material than Juvenal, Dio, and Suetonius do when describing the same event.⁵⁶ Tacitus says that his readers may find it difficult to believe that she actually "listened to the words of the *auspices*, made offerings, and sacrificed before the gods" (*Ann.* 11.27 *illam audisse auspicum verba, subisse <vota>, sacrificasse apud deos*). With these sacrifices, Messalina is explicitly said to be performing a cult action for the gods that normally attended weddings.⁵⁷ Taking auspices at weddings was already somewhat anachronistic by Cicero's time (*Div.* 1.28): they probably were not performed by professional *auspices* but by friends of the bride or groom,⁵⁸ but, for Tacitus, they are nevertheless significant enough to warrant specific mention. Coupled with the sacrifices, the *auspicum verba* seem more significant than they do in Juvenal's description (10.336) and are possibly more than mere empty words. The unusual phrase *subisse vota* is the product of an emendation whose significance is difficult to determine, if indeed it is to be retained in the text at all,⁵⁹ but the fact that sacrifice concludes the list

⁵⁴ Lipsius suggested that the sacrifice was for Castor and Pollux, and was intended to ward off famine by asking those seafaring gods to grant good weather to ships bringing additional grain to Rome (Furneaux 1907, 40; Koestermann 1967, 88); Malloch 2013, 406 convincingly argues against this. Claudius' interest in and improvements to Ostia's harbor may have been related to concern about the grain trade (Meiggs 1973, 6; Malloch 2013, 406).

⁵⁵ OLD s.v. *sollemne* 1: the plural signifies "rituals" or even "offerings," perhaps prefiguring Messalina's sacrifices (*Ann.* 11.27). Cf. Nero's similarly twisted marriage to Pythagoras (*Ann.* 15.37.4 *in modum sollemnium coniugiorum*). For the contrast between the rituals, see Malloch 2013, 406–7.

⁵⁶ See Treggiari 1991, 169. Juvenal mentions the *auspex* but not the sacrifice (10.336). Neither Suet. *Claud.* 26.2 nor Dio 60.31 mentions any component of the marriage rituals.

⁵⁷ It is not known which gods were the recipients of these sacrifices; whether they were "consultative" sacrifices performed before the wedding, or were part of the ceremony itself; whether they were animal sacrifices; or whether they took place in public shrines or at specially constructed altars (Treggiari 1991, 164; Hersch 2010, 121–2).

⁵⁸ Treggiari 1991, 164; Wardle 2006, 177.

⁵⁹ The insertion of *vota* is proposed by Draeger and Hanslik; both Woodman 2004, 386 and Malloch 2013, 43 prefer to obelize or omit *subisse*. The word may be a technical term drawn from ritual describing either the bride's entrance into the husband's house or the ritual donning of the *flammeum* (Nipperdey, based on *Ann.* 15.37.9). I have not found another example of *vota subire* in Latin literature. See discussion at Malloch 2013, 410.

suggests that the phrase, like the other elements of the tricolon, has to do with cult. Messalina's appropriation of the cultic aspects of a true wedding for her false one, then, is a perversion of ritual that could bring down the anger of the gods; she, no less than Claudius, suffers from misplaced religiosity.

Another twisted ritual that Claudius' absence also fails to curtail is Messalina's celebration of the *vindemia*, which implies the possibility of divine vengeance.

at Messalina non alias solutior luxu, adulto autumnno simulacrum vindemiae per domum celebrabat. urgeri prela, fluere lacus; et feminae pellibus accinctae adsultabant ut sacrificantes vel insanientes Bacchae; ipsa crine fluxo thyrsus quatiens, iuxtaque Silius hedera vinctus, gerere cothurnos, iacere caput, strepente circum procaci choro. ferunt Vettium Valentem lascivia in praealtam arborem conisum, interrogantibus quid aspiceret, respondisse tempestatem ab Ostia atrocem, sive coeperat ea species, seu forte lapsa vox in praesagium vertit.

(Ann. 11.31.2–3)

(But Messalina, more dissolute in her luxury than ever, celebrated an imitation of the *vindemia* throughout the house when autumn was at its height. Wine-presses were pressed, lakes flowed, and women girded with skins leapt about like sacrificing or raving bacchantes, Messalina herself with flowing hair shaking a thyrsus, and Silius beside her, crowned with ivy and wearing platform boots, shaking his head, while a lively chorus roared around them. They say that Vettius Valens climbed into a very tall tree out of playfulness, and that when people asked him what he could see, he responded, "A fierce storm out of Ostia"—whether such a sight had actually begun, or a statement that slipped out by chance turned into a prophecy.)

Tacitus' verbal allusions to the maenads of Euripides' *Bacchae* undoubtedly give the passage Dionysiac overtones, something not present in the parallel accounts of Suetonius and Dio.⁶⁰ To this literary Bacchic flavor, Tacitus adds an unmistakable element of real-life religious ritual. Messalina's maenads are compared to worshippers of Bacchus who actually perform sacrifice, making them no mere literary topos but ritual actors in a cult that has a history of persecution in Rome due to its perceived threat to the sociopolitical order.⁶¹ Similarly, Silius in his crown of ivy is no merely character in a debauched drama, but is assimilated to the god as the recipient of their sacrifices.⁶² This recalls the Petra brother's dream about Claudius' crown of vine-leaves, and a link with Artemidorus' observations on the dangers of Bacchus impersonators appearing in dreams suddenly becomes more plausible: Claudius fears that

⁶⁰ See Santoro L'Hoir 2006, 234–5; Malloch 2013, 432 n. 304. Henrichs 1978, 159 n. 118 sees a verbal echo of Eur. *Bacch.* 1061 in Ann. 11.31.3 *in praealtam arborem conisum*.

⁶¹ Henrichs 1978, 157; Malloch 2013, 433.

⁶² Seif 1973, 117 sees the way Silius is described as an indication of his position superior to that of Messalina; *contra* Malloch 2013, 436.

Silius will wear not an ivy crown, but a real one (cf. 11.30.2, 11.31.1). Silius' costume may also be intended to evoke Mark Antony's affinity for Bacchus; there is perhaps a particular resonance with Velleius' account of Antony's Dionysiac devotion, where the same elements (*thyrsus*, *cothurnus* boots, and ivy crown) are mentioned and the anecdote accompanies Antony's decision to attack Italy (Vell. Pat. 2.82.4).⁶³ Silius and Messalina, the great-granddaughter of this Bacchus impersonator, may shortly share a similar fate.⁶⁴ In addition to the perversion of cultic memory that this ceremony constitutes, then, memory asserts itself in another way: as the repetition of a pattern established in a previous generation (Dionysiac revels go before a great fall).

Vettius Valens' quip⁶⁵ about a storm in Ostia may, therefore, in fact be unintentionally prophetic, as Tacitus suggests. The storm of divine vengeance that seems to be brewing, however, remains detached from the emperor, who is his typical passive and suggestible self, the opposite of an avenging deity. Some of Claudius' advisors say that he should be concerned with maintaining security in the city instead of exacting vengeance from Messalina (*Ann.* 11.31.1 *securitati ante quam vindictae consuleret*). This again brings to mind the divine concern with *securitas* or *ultio* at *Hist.* 1.3.2: it would be more characteristic of a real god to prioritize vengeance, but Claudius is too busy being afraid that he has already lost his power to Silius to show any concern for either *securitas* or *vindicta*. Apparently fulfilling Valens' "prophecy," messengers announce to the revellers that Claudius is coming "ready for vengeance" (*Ann.* 11.32.1 *promptum ultioni*), but his vacillation (11.34.1) makes it unclear that he really *is* ready. Despite his subjects' attempt to assimilate him to a divine agent of vengeance, Claudius is too weak to play the role, and Narcissus must step in.⁶⁶

With Narcissus now running the show, members of Rome's traditional priesthoods are powerless. Messalina asks Vibidia, the senior Vestal Virgin⁶⁷ to intervene on her behalf with Claudius, "to approach the ears of the *pontifex maximus* and try out his clemency" (*Ann.* 11.32.2 *pontifici<s> maximi aures adire, clementiam expetere*). This would have been a perfectly traditional thing for Vibidia to do. Romans regularly asked the Vestal Virgins to intercede for them in legal proceedings, possibly because the priestess' juridical privileges were greater than those of most Roman women.⁶⁸ Messalina knows her antiquarian, religious-minded husband well: Vibidia is to address him not as husband or as emperor, but as *pontifex maximus*, who stands at the head of all

⁶³ Seif 1973, 308–9; Woodman 1983, 213–4. Cf. also Plut. *Ant.* 33.6–34.1, 50.6, 75.4–5, with Pelling 1988 *ad loc.*

⁶⁴ Henrichs 1978, 159.

⁶⁵ On the colloquial character of his expression, see Malloch 2013, 437.

⁶⁶ Cf. Seif 1973, 118.

⁶⁷ She may be the daughter of Vibidius Virro (cf. *Ann.* 2.48.3), enrolled as a Vestal in AD 17 (Benario 1983, 135 and Rüpke 2008, 630, 951; Goodyear 1981, 342 n. 1 is less certain).

⁶⁸ Cf. Cic. *Font.* 47; Suet. *Iul.* 1.2; Lorsch Wildfang 2006, 67–70.

of Rome's religious institutions.⁶⁹ But in the event, she is not able to get access to him and speaks only to Narcissus, who treats her quite rudely: "He responded that the *princeps* would hear her and that there would be an opportunity of erasing the charge; meanwhile, he said, the virgin should go and see to her sacred rites" (11.34.3 *auditurum principem et fore diluendi criminis facultatem respondit: iret interim virgo et sacra capesseret*). His two-part formulation, using *i* followed by another imperative, is a marker of dismissiveness and irritation, while addressing her as *virgo* (that is, by her job title rather than by name), also has a dismissive tone.⁷⁰ The freedman's lack of respect for Vibidia and her office is obvious, and he also tells her an outright lie: Narcissus has no intention of actually allowing Messalina to make her case to Claudius, as he later reveals when he sends in assassins to finish Messalina off, to eliminate the risk that she might convince Claudius to spare her if he sees her in person.⁷¹ The priestess is merely trying to reassert her traditional role as intercessor,⁷² but Claudius' respect for religious traditions has evidently not rubbed off on Narcissus.

The death of Messalina, then, shows the failure of Claudius' revivalism in two senses. His focus on the preservation of cultic memory and the duties of his censorship, while a welcome contrast with Tiberius' less consistently conservative attitude, proved a distraction from his wife's ritual misdeeds. Furthermore, Claudius' revivalism does not seem to penetrate beyond himself: apparently it has not made an impact even on those closest to him, since he is unable to prevent his wife from engaging in perverted forms of traditional rituals, or to impart to one of his freedmen and closest courtiers the same respect for cult personnel. Despite Claudius' best efforts at steering Rome on a course of antiquarianism and cultic revival, those closest to him show an astonishing lack of respect for Rome's religious institutions.

6.4 RISE OF AGRIPPINA: FLATTERY AND IMPIETY

The downsides to Claudius' attention to cultic memory will only intensify when Agrippina becomes his new wife, as his attention to ritual correctness is undermined and he continues to be at the mercy of those around him. In the search for a new spouse for the emperor, Vitellius, Claudius' colleague in the censorship, uses religiously problematic rhetoric to advocate for

⁶⁹ For the relationship between Vestals and *pontifex maximus*, see Beard et al. 1998, i.57–8.

⁷⁰ *Iret et capesseret* is the rendering in *oratio obliqua* of what would have been an imperative in direct speech: *i et capesse*. See OLD s.v. *eo* 10; Malloch 2013, 448. On addressing someone by job title, see Dickey 2002, 204. I assume *virgo* is here more or less equivalent to *sacerdos*, rather than the generic way to address an unmarried woman (on which see Dickey 2002, 201–2).

⁷¹ *Ann.* 11.37.2; cf. also 37.1.

⁷² Lorsch Wildfang 2006, 103–4.

Agrippina. He attacks Silanus with a (fabricated) charge of incest (*Ann.* 12.4.2), so that his fiancée Octavia will be free to marry Nero in accordance with Agrippina's wishes. Vitellius is described as "covering up his slavish deceptions under the name of censor, a foreseer of growing dominations" (12.4.1 *nomine censoris serviles fallacias obtegens ingruentiumque dominationum provisor*). *Provisor* could be meant in the sense of exercising forethought or taking precautions, but it also has overtones of foretelling the future.⁷³ And what he foresees are "growing dominations;" the word *ingruo* can be used to describe imminent or threatening weather or storms, so Vitellius' predictions are assimilated to Vettius Valens' vision of the threatening storm of Claudius.⁷⁴ All this implies that to Vitellius, the movements of the Julio-Claudian family are the only things worth predicting. This is also the first time in the extant text the reader has heard that Vitellius was Claudius' colleague in the censorship, although their period of office is already over; as Tacitus notes, it is therefore anomalous for Vitellius to exercise his censorial power by striking Silanus from the senatorial record "although membership of the Senate had already been revised and the *lustrum* had been completed" (12.4.3 *quamquam lecto pridem senatu lustrum condito*).⁷⁵ The cultic technical term *lustrum condere* emphasizes the religious problem this constitutes: the rite that was supposed to mark the end of Vitellius' term of office is forgotten in the service of a false charge.

The atmosphere Tacitus creates—a world where traditions about rituals and the interpretation of signs are repurposed in the service of obsequiousness to the Imperial house—sets the stage for Vitellius' speech before the Senate in support of Agrippina. He uses words and phrases with strong overtones of ritual, which sound strange when coming from a censor and applied to a marriage. One quality he praises in Agrippina is her "sanctity" (12.6.1 *sanctimonia*), which can signify mere moral uprightness, but also has strong religious overtones and is otherwise applied only to Vestal Virgins by Tacitus (2.86.1, 3.69.6).⁷⁶ Vitellius' use of it here suggests that Agrippina is the virtual equivalent of a priestess. This recalls the close association between Livia and the Vestal Virgins in the reign of Tiberius.⁷⁷ We have not seen that kind of connection between Imperial women and priestesses in the Claudian books thus far, and we have no way of knowing whether Tacitus continued the theme in the missing books on Caligula and Claudius. Its appearance here, however, shows us that this association is by no means dead; an Imperial woman's *sanctimonia* puts her on a different priestess-like plane, above regular women. Vitellius

⁷³ Furneaux 1907, 66 translates the word as "foreseer." Tacitus uses *providere* of ominous dreams (*Ann.* 2.14.1), the predictions of astrologers (4.58.2), and the gods' foresight (13.14.3), as do other authors; see also *TLL* s.v. *provideo* (vol. x.2, fasc. XV) IIa2a and examples there cited.

⁷⁴ *OLD* s.v. *ingruo* 2, 3b. I am grateful to A. J. Woodman for pointing out this connection.

⁷⁵ Davies 2004, 196. For a different interpretation, see Seif 1973, 167.

⁷⁶ Seif 1973, 176; Benario 1983, 149.

⁷⁷ See §4.3, pp. 180–1.

goes even further, in attributing to divine foresight the fact that Agrippina and Claudius' union will be chaste: "In fact it was noteworthy that, thanks to the foresight of the gods, a widow would be joined to a *princeps* who had only experienced his own marriages" (12.6.2 *quid vero egregium, quod provisu deum vidua iungeretur principi sua tantum matrimonia experto*). This obsequious claim is proved false by Tacitus' recent assertion that Agrippina and Claudius are already having a sexual relationship before marriage (12.5.1 *amore illicito*). *Provisu deum* recalls Claudius' own assertion that Rome's positive state of affairs could be attributed to the gods' kindness (11.15.2 *benignitati deum*); Claudius seemed to be assuming that the gods are kind mostly because he was out of touch, but in Vitellius' case, the euphemism seems meant deliberately to deceive. Vitellius' speech gives the overall impression that ritual norms (be it the censorial *lustrum*, priestly sanctity, or the idea of divine providence) are in his mind all in the service of the Imperial family.

Even more striking, however, is how Vitellius talks about the alterations to norms surrounding marriage that Claudius' marriage to his own niece would constitute:

at enim nova nobis in fratrum filias coniugia: sed aliis gentibus sollemnia, neque lege ulla prohibita; et sobrinarum diu ignorata tempore addito percubuisse. morem accommodari prout conducatur, et fore hoc quoque in iis quae mox usurpentur. (*Ann.* 12.6.3)

(To be sure, marriages with the daughters of brothers were new among us; but other nations had such rites, and they were not prohibited by any law; and marriages with second cousins, which had been ignored for a long time, had become more frequent as time passed. Custom is accommodated in accordance with what is advantageous, and this too was among the things which would soon be practiced.)

This assertion that the *sollemnia* of marriage are subject to revision with the changing times raises two problems. Vitellius turns out to be wrong about the gradual acceptance of marriages between kin. Cousin-marriage seems to have become completely accepted by the late Republic, and so is not all that uncommon from a Claudian perspective; but Tacitus' readers probably would be able to bear witness to the fact that marriages between uncles and nieces never did become normal, as Juvenal's excoriation of Domitian as a polluted adulterer for his marriage to his niece Julia shows (2.29–33).⁷⁸ Furthermore, Vitellius' valorization of change runs counter to Roman cultural memory and its principles of conservatism. The idea that *mos* can give way to expediency recalls Tiberius' statement, also made in the context of altering

⁷⁸ See Moreau 2002, 202–3; Lennon 2014, 74–5. Vitellius cites no examples of an uncle–niece marriage prior to Claudius and Agrippina, suggesting that there really were no previous known examples he could use (Moreau 2002, 200).

traditions surrounding marriage rituals, that Augustus “had bent certain things from horrible antiquity to the use of the present” (*Ann.* 4.16.4). There is no evidence that Vitellius is inspired directly by the *flamen Dialis* discussions, but the similarity of argumentation suggests that, while Tiberius’ changes may have been the only feasible solution to preserve cultic memory vis-à-vis the *flamen* and *flaminica*, the general principle that tradition is the enemy of expediency to which he gave voice has permeated the cultural consciousness in a dangerous way. Vitellius’ focus on innovation may also be influenced by Claudius himself. Although Claudius is a traditionalist in matters of cult, he has elsewhere advocated for change. In his speech encouraging the admission of Gauls to the Senate, he argued against the idea that to do so would constitute a break from tradition, saying, “Everything that is now thought to be very old was once new . . . This, too, shall become old, and what today we defend with precedents will one day be *among* the precedents” (11.24.7 *omnia . . . quae nunc vetustissima creduntur, nova fuere . . . inveterascet hoc quoque, et quod hodie exemplis tuemur, inter exempla erit*).⁷⁹ This idea that emperors who innovate can create new *exempla* to be used by future generations is itself not new and recalls Augustus’ similar statement in the *Res Gestae* (8.5).⁸⁰ So the notion of change driven by the opinions and actions of one man is something that has characterized not just Tiberius, but all emperors—and not just cult, but other aspects of life as well.

But none of those other changes are as potentially damaging to Rome’s future as are ritual changes of the kind Vitellius is advocating. For despite what Vitellius might say, Claudius’ proposed marriage is actually hated by the gods:

necdum celebrare sollemnia nuptiarum audebant, nullo exemplo deductae in domum patruī fratris filiae: quin et incestum, ac si sperneretur, ne in malum publicum erumperet, metuebatur. (*Ann.* 12.5.1)

(They did not yet dare to celebrate the rites of a wedding, since there was no precedent for leading the daughter of a brother into her uncle’s house; in fact, it was actually incest, and if that were spurned, there was a fear that it might erupt into a disaster for the state.)

Incestum implies religious pollution: it derives from *in* + *castus* and denotes “any offence which defiled the sanctity of religious laws.”⁸¹ The term is positioned at the intersection of sex and religion; it is also the crime of which Vestal Virgins are said to be guilty when they break their vow of chastity. Claudius’ incest has similar implications for the maintenance of the

⁷⁹ On the theme of innovation in the speech, see Malloch 2013, 376.

⁸⁰ So Malloch 2013, 378. See also Cooley 2009, 144.

⁸¹ Ogilvie 1965, on Livy 2.42.11; *OLD* s.v. *incestus* 1, and cf. also *incestum* 1, “profanation of religious rites”; Moreau 2002, 18–19. For incest seen as a crime of religious pollution, see Moreau 2002, 43–5; Lennon 2014, 72–5. See also Harries 2007, 90–1.

pax deorum.⁸² The dreaded but unspecified *malum publicum*, like a disease, is framed as a “divine judgment,” a reprisal taken by the gods for the religious crime the marriage would constitute.⁸³ Claudius and Agrippina seem to realize this is a possible consequence of their actions, yet they persist. Vitellius’ rhetoric in *Ann.* 12.6 can in fact be seen as an attempt to talk the Senate out of the traditional interpretation of this marriage as ritually dangerous *incestum*, allaying the public’s fears by asserting that it is fine to shed such traditional fears. The speech is in a way a massive cover-up operation. Claudius, for all his punctilious attention to religious correctness during the year of his censorship, persists in his illicit actions even when he recognizes their potential to draw down disastrous consequences. This underlines again the futility of that devotion to cultic memory: it distracts him from Messalina’s ritual improprieties, and it is actually contradicted by his actions when it comes to Agrippina. And Tacitus gives the lie to Vitellius’ defense of innovation by describing the potential consequences of the marriage in terms of divine punishment. This is a clear demonstration of the principle that while changes in cultic matters may not always be a bad idea, they are much more dangerous than change in other areas because of their potential to upset the *pax deorum*. Creating new *exempla* is part of what the principate does, but in the cultic aspect of Roman cultural memory it can be a problem.

People’s reactions to the marriage are a powerful demonstration of Romans’ inconsistency in their appreciation of cultic memory. The immediate response of the Senate and people to Vitellius’ proposal is an exaggerated display of enthusiasm: “A heterogeneous multitude formed into a crowd and shouted that the Roman people had the same prayers” (*Ann.* 12.7.1 *conglobatur promisca multitudo populumque Romanum eadem orare clamitat*). Use of the word *orare* here recalls the *preces* to Tiberius on his accession (1.11.1); the application of religious language to the emperor, something that seemed to have died out under Claudius, is suddenly back in evidence. But the people sing a different tune on the actual wedding day, when the emperor not only sees Silanus commit suicide and exiles his sister, but also performs an obscure ritual to expiate their alleged incest:

addidit Claudius sacra ex legibus Tulli regis piaculaque apud lucum Dianae per pontifices danda, inindentibus cunctis, quod poenae procurationesque incesti id temporis exquirerentur. (12.8.1)

(Claudius added rites in accordance with the laws of King Tullius, and expiations at the Grove of Diana that were to be made by the *pontifices*; everybody laughed that the penalties and expiatory sacrifices for incest were being sought out at such a time.)

⁸² Cf. Hickson 1993b, 26.

⁸³ Furneaux 1907, 68; cf. Green 1998, 773–4; Lennon 2014, 74. On the language of disease, see Woodman 2010, 50.

Tacitus, unlike Dio and Suetonius, makes the expiation and Silanus' suicide take place on the same day as Claudius' wedding; this emphasizes the "dissonance" between Claudius' marriage and the incest he condemns.⁸⁴ Claudius' religious punctiliousness, notoriously absent when it came to his own marriage's *incestum*, is suddenly back in action in response to the alleged *incestum* of Silanus. Diana's grove is probably that at Nemi in Aricia, once connected with the Latin League.⁸⁵ A family connection between the Junii Silani and the sanctuary's founder makes it an appropriate site for the ritual, though it is not otherwise attested as a place to perform expiations:⁸⁶ the antiquarian Claudius has done his research and assiduously purifies the family sanctuary with the help of the state cult establishment, represented by the *pontifices*. It is also significant that the rites he follows were invented by Servius Tullius.⁸⁷ Tacitus has referred to Tullius before, as "the creator of laws which even kings were supposed to obey" (3.26.4 *sed praecipuus Servius Tullius sanctorum legum fuit, quis etiam reges obtemperarent*).⁸⁸ Contrary to what Tullius tried to ensure, Claudius, in expiating the fabricated incest of the Silanus siblings after legalizing his own incestuous marriage by special proclamation (12.7.2), is holding himself to different standards from those to which he holds his subjects. Tacitus does not say whether Claudius merely lacks self-awareness or disingenuously desires to deflect incest-related anger onto Silanus, who, in engaging in sexual relations with his sister, is arguably committing a more serious form of incest than Claudius and Agrippina.⁸⁹ But his sacrifice is coupled with Agrippina's recall of Seneca from exile, an act of mercy intended to draw public attention away from her scandalous marriage (12.8.2), so the reader may be meant to think that Claudius' sacrifice is also an act of deflection.

Although they apparently have swallowed Vitellius' rhetoric of the marriage's sanctity, the people show by their laughter that they see through Claudius' ploy. This recalls the inconsistency Pelling sees in the critics of Tiberius' relationship with emperor cult.⁹⁰ If they really view Claudius and

⁸⁴ Seif 1973, 184.

⁸⁵ Furneaux 1907, 71; Koestermann 1967, 121. The sanctuary of Diana in the city of Rome was usually called *aedes* or *templum*, not *lucus* (Pasqualini 2001, 147 n. 3).

⁸⁶ Pasqualini 2001, 146. For other interpretations of the choice of Diana, see Green 1998, 787; Moreau 2002, 48–9.

⁸⁷ Servius Tullius was commonly referred to merely as "Tullius" (Green 1998, 77–8 n. 28, 785–6). He founded Diana's temple in Rome, closely connected with the Arician sanctuary (cf. *Ann.* 15.41.1), and ritual impurity was important in the first sacrifice performed there (Livy 1.45.6). Tullus Hostilius instituted *piacula* to expiate Horatius' killing of his sister (Livy 1.26.12–13 *piaculo; piacularibus sacrificiis*), but is not connected with Diana or the grove in Aricia (Furneaux 1907, 71; Pasqualini 2001, 141; and Moreau 2002, 47 believe Hostilius is meant).

⁸⁸ So Koestermann 1967, 120–1; Seif 1973, 183 n. 53.

⁸⁹ So Moreau 2002, 46.

⁹⁰ See §4.4, p. 191, and Pelling 2010, 373.

Agrippina's marriage as ritually problematic *incestum*, the people's outspoken prayers for the marriage to take place (*Ann.* 12.7.1 *orare*) are a lie, a stifling of their genuine (and correct) understanding of the ritual problems of *incestum* because they do not want to contradict the *princeps*. Yet even here, when Tacitus reveals their "true" views on the matter, their response to Claudius' sacrifices is laughter rather than outrage, or even sinister grumbling of the sort Tiberius engendered. Claudius' subjects have enough religious awareness to know that his marriage and hypocritical expiation are problematic, but not enough to protest them seriously. This bumbling emperor's hypocritical rituals may be amusing, but the spirit of actual criticism of irreligiosity seems to have died; the contrast points to the consequences of the two-facedness that the principate encourages and the potential consequences of this shift.

There are already consequences for Claudius' incest in the short term, for Agrippina's first act as the *princeps*' wife is to oversee the destruction of Lollia Paulina, her onetime rival for Claudius' hand: she "set in motion charges and an accuser, who was to make accusations about the Chaldaeans, magicians, and that the statue of Apollo of Claros had been interrogated about the commander's wedding" (*Ann.* 12.22.1 *molitur crimina et accusatorem, qui obiceret Chaldaeos, magos interrogatumque Apollinis Clarii simulacrum super nuptiis imperatoris*). These accusations show the continuance, and indeed intensification, of tendencies we have already seen at work in the *Annals*. Lollia's consultation of Clarian Apollo recalls Germanicus' experience with the same god;⁹¹ the same "swift exit" falls upon her after she consults the god, but not for supernatural reasons: it is not Apollo, but Agrippina, who seals her fate. The charges of consulting astrologers and magicians are among those also levelled at Libo Drusus during the reign of Tiberius (2.27.2), the first example in the *Annals* when charges of occult practices were deployed by *delatores*.⁹² Comparison of Libo's situation with Lollia Paulina's shows how much things have deteriorated: Libo at least *had* a trial, unlike Lollia; and Tiberius' hidden malice, while sinister, pales in comparison with the deadly efficacy of Agrippina's open hatred. We can also compare Piso, presumed guilty of cursing Germanicus although Tacitus had left the matter ambiguous (3.13.2). It is difficult, of course, to chart any long-term developments in the nature of such trials, given the loss of *Annals* 7–10; but everything we see points to an intensification of such charges of occult practices as a way of bringing down enemies and suggests that Agrippina's concern, like that of the

⁹¹ *Simulacrum* suggests Lollia consults a statue of the god using magical incantations (on this practice, see Parke 1985, 141). Some, however (e.g. Furneaux 1907, 85), emend to *oraculum*, which would indicate she sent an epistolary enquiry to the shrine in Claros itself (cf. Ovid *Fast.* 1.20, and see Lampinen 2013, 56).

⁹² See §1.5.

accusers of Libo and Piso before her, was never truly with maintaining religious correctness in Rome by policing alternative forms of divination, but with entrapping opponents who are innocent (at least of those particular charges). Evidently, too little has been done to combat this, even prior to Claudius. Tiberius' expulsions of astrologers and magicians (2.32.3) have apparently been ineffective, not to mention hypocritical since he himself practiced astrology (6.20.2).⁹³ Agrippina's accusations therefore form an important part of Tacitus' narrative of legal entrapment based on occult charges, but they also say something important about the reign of Claudius specifically. The most recent comparandum for Agrippina is her predecessor Messalina, who also used charges of divination to bring down her enemies the Petra brothers. So it is not just Agrippina, but all of Claudius' wives, who make such accusations. And Claudius goes along with Agrippina's hatred readily, giving a speech in which he abruptly moves from praising Lollia's illustrious ancestry to declaring that her consultations put the state at risk and that she must be stopped (12.22.2). Claudius, then, as Tiberius did, is lending aid to people who are savage: his wives.

While Agrippina makes these deadly accusations, Claudius' attention is again directed elsewhere, partly to religious and antiquarian matters like the revival of the *augurium salutis* (Ann. 12.23.1 *Salutis augurium quinque et viginta annis omissum repeti ac deinde continuari placitum*, "It was decided that the Augury of Safety, lost for twenty-five years, should be revived and then continued"). In this ceremony, the augurs consulted the gods by interpreting bird-signs to see whether they would allow the praetors to pray for the *salus populi Romani*; it could only be taken on a day when Rome was not at war.⁹⁴ If a lapse in the *augurium* did indeed occur in AD 24, as Tacitus states, he did not mention it at the appropriate point in his account; this might be an error, or perhaps implies that no one in amnesiac Rome has noticed its absence apart from Claudius himself.⁹⁵ Reviving the *augurium salutis*, then, is the laudable retrieval of an ancient religious custom from oblivion. But simply taking the *augurium* does not guarantee a good answer. For example, in 63 BC, the *augurium Salutis* was vitiated and had to be repeated when unlucky birds arrived, and the augur Appius Claudius Pulcher announced to the consul Cicero that this portended civil war (Cic. Div. 1.105; Dio 37.25.1).⁹⁶ We may wonder whether this revived *augurium* might reveal similarly bad

⁹³ Cf. Davies 2004, 166.

⁹⁴ Dio 37.24.1–2; Linderski 1986, 2255–6.

⁹⁵ Koestermann 1967, 145. Some have emended *viginta* to *septuaginta* to create a rough correspondence with the last known performance of the *augurium Salutis* in 29 BC. For Augustus' revival, see Suet. Aug. 31.4; Dio 51.20.4; Winkler 1995, 36–7; Kearsley 2009, 151–2; Wardle 2014, 253–4. An inscription (CIL 6.36841 = ILS 9337), which may refer to the *augurium Salutis*, indicates it was also performed in AD 17, possibly in celebration of peace following Germanicus' victory in Germany (Winkler 1995, 55).

⁹⁶ See Wardle 2006, 360; Kearsley 2009, 151 n. 17.

news in the future; after all, the next communication from the gods will be negative (the prodigies of *Ann.* 12.43). Furthermore, the reader is not told the outcome of the *augurium*, or even whether it was ever actually taken; so there is no evidence, despite Claudius' best intentions, of the rite actually being reincorporated into Roman cultural memory in any meaningful way. Even the way Tacitus reports the revival, in the passive voice, detracts from the picture of Claudius as an active figure.⁹⁷ Claudius' actions in the religious-antiquarian sphere have so far been largely positive, both in providing him with an arena for good press in the present, and from the point of view of his relationship with cultural memory. But the reader now begins to realize that even here, Claudius is ineffective.

Tacitus similarly undermines Claudius' extension of the *pomerium*, the city's ancient ritual boundary:

et pomerium urbis auxit Caesar, more prisco, quo iis, qui protulere imperium, etiam terminos urbis propagare datur. nec tamen duces Romani, quamquam magnis nationibus subactis, usurpaverant nisi L. Sulla et divus Augustus. regum in eo ambitio vel gloria varie vulgata. sed initium condendi, et quod pomerium Romulus posuerit, noscere haud absurdum reor. (*Ann.* 12.23.2–24.1)

(And Caesar enlarged the city's *pomerium*, in the ancient way that it was granted to those who extended the empire to enlarge the boundaries of the city as well. Nevertheless, no Roman generals had carried this out, although great nations had been subdued, except for L. Sulla and the divine Augustus. Various things have been divulged about the kings' ambition or glory for this task; but I do not think it absurd to examine the beginning of its foundation, and the sort of *pomerium* Romulus set up.)

Since we are missing the part of the *Annals* where Tacitus told of Claudius' annexation of Britain, it is hard to know what he made of it; but certainly the fact that Claudius actually expanded the empire sets him apart from Tiberius and Caligula, and that conquest and the concomitant enlargement of the *pomerium* show him in a traditional mode of military prowess ritually commemorated, associating himself also with the great religious reformer Augustus.⁹⁸ But when Tacitus states that most other successful commanders chose not to use their right to enlarge the *pomerium*, and suggests that the kings established it out of self-aggrandizement, he shows Claudius in a bad light by implication. As Boatwright notes, "Tacitus tempers his praise by depicting Claudius' act as vainglorious" and "thus insinuates that Claudius, despite his eagerness to appear as the restorer of Rome's glorious past, fell short of the ancient men and standards."⁹⁹ And in the context of Agrippina's rise to prominence,

⁹⁷ Boatwright 1984, 41 n. 21.

⁹⁸ On the vexed question of Augustus' pomerial extension, see Boatwright 1986, 13–4, 19, who suggests Claudius invented the precedent.

⁹⁹ Boatwright 1984, 43; *contra* Pagnotta 1977.

accompanied by Britannicus' eclipse in Nero's shadow, Claudius' decision to expend his energy on an old-fashioned, self-aggrandizing act does not bode well; any hopes that Rome's relationship with the gods has really been improved by all this revivalism will soon be dashed.¹⁰⁰

To be sure, Claudius' antiquarianism is less negatively presented than it could have been; compare, for example, Seneca's discussion of the expansion of the *pomerium* (*Brev. Vit.* 13.8–9), in which one of his characters "pedantically... bring[s] out the questionable and almost obscurantist nature of the debate."¹⁰¹ Historical and cultic details, for Tacitus, are not peripheral; Tacitus himself defends the *pomerium* as worthy of the reader's attention¹⁰² and engages in a bit of antiquarianism of his own by appending a short digression on its location and history. He mentions Romulus' institution (*Ann.* 12.24.1) and Titus Tatius' enlargement (12.24.2) of the *pomerium* in a passage that shares verbal features with Livy's account of Servius Tullius' pomerial expansion, thereby weaving together the threads of Claudius' own antiquarianism and the power of history to preserve religious details. Tacitus enumerates the areas of the city enclosed within or added to the *pomerium* by each of the ancient kings and notes that some traces of Romulus' *pomerium* can be seen in the city still, such as the golden statue of the bull in the Forum Boarium where the digging of the *pomerium* began (note present tense *adspicimus* 12.24.1). But when it comes to Claudius, Tacitus suddenly becomes close-mouthed about the details, saying only, "It is easy to recognize what boundaries Claudius laid at that time, and this has been written up in the public *acta*" (12.24.2 *et quos tum Claudius terminos posuerit, facile cognitu et publicis actis perscriptum*). While Tacitus educates the reader by enumerating the specific pomerial additions of Rome's legendary past, a reader who wants to learn which areas of the city Claudius added would have to go and inspect the *pomerium*'s boundary stones or consult the *acta publica*; Tacitus does not dignify Claudius' additions with a specific mention. This increases the impression of futility, but also of a problem with memory itself. If we see enlarging the *pomerium* as an act of memory, commemorating the empire's expansion and therefore Rome's success and divine favor in the wars that led to that expansion, Tacitus undermines Claudius' contribution by refusing to say what he added either to the empire or to the *pomerium* and suggests that even where he tries to follow Rome's cultic traditions, his attempts will not be long remembered. This is deeply ironic, given the implication, reinforced by Tacitus' allusions to Livy, that Claudius is an emperor cast in an antiquarian mold, who cares about ancient rites and tries to keep them alive and relevant in the present. Thus we see that a change of wife for Claudius has meant little change for his principate,

¹⁰⁰ Davies 2004, 196.

¹⁰¹ Williams 2003, 208. Cf. Griffin 1962, 108–10; Boatwright 1984, 39.

¹⁰² Cf. Griffin 1990, 485–6.

just as the change to a *princeps* who, unlike Tiberius, is concerned with cultic memory, has brought little real change to Rome's religious landscape.

6.5 DIVINE ANGER AND THE RISE OF AGRIPPINA AND NERO

The other factor that problematizes Claudius' attempts at restoring cultic memory is Agrippina, whose sinister activities indicate a parallel, negative religious trend which only escalates as *Annals* 12 progresses. The sequence of events that Claudius set in motion by discovering Messalina's adultery during his censorship (*Ann.* 11.25.5 *ut deinde ardesceret in nuptias incestas*) continues as Agrippina insinuates her son Nero into Britannicus' rightful place in the Imperial succession and convinces Claudius to adopt him, an episode recounted immediately after the enlargement of the *pomerium* (12.25). Agrippina herself also begins to be elevated to a loftier status, earning the title of "Augusta" around the same time (12.26.1), an indication of her insidious role in this elevation of her son. Britannicus is universally pitied: "After these things had been accomplished, nobody was so devoid of pity that the fortune of Britannicus did not affect him with grief" (12.26.2 *quibus patratris nemo adeo expers misericordiae fuit, quem non Britannici fortuna maeror<e> adficeret*). Britannicus' *fortuna*, now on a downward trajectory, contrasts with Nero's changed status. The preference for Nero over Britannicus at the Secular Games, even if Tacitus implied it was incorrect to read it as an actual *praesagium* (11.11.2), has apparently been fulfilled. Again, we may wonder about the shifts in public opinion: the people who were so keen on Nero that they all but prophesied his ascendancy now seem to regret the turn Britannicus' fortune has taken, little understanding their own complicity in his changed circumstances: pity for Britannicus now is too little, too late. The same is true when Nero parades during circus games in the *vestis triumphalis* while Britannicus wears the humble *praetexta*: the spectators note their difference in dress and "accordingly made presumptions about the fortune of each" (12.41.2 *perinde fortunam utriusque praesumeret*). At Agrippina's insistence, those who openly "pitied Britannicus' lot" (*sortem Britannici miserabantur*) are actually removed. This forecasts the even more belated misgivings of the *vulgus* during the prodigious rainstorm that attends his funeral after Nero murders him (13.17.1).¹⁰³ The arc that will lead to that murder has already begun with Nero's adoption, and no one seems to see the connection.

¹⁰³ See §7.2, pp. 288–9.

Agrippina, too, is rising, and the extent of her ascendancy becomes clear when the defeated British leader Caratacus is brought to Rome in chains with his family. The Britons address *preces* for forgiveness to the emperor (*Ann.* 12.36.3), but their worshipful attitude in thanking the emperor for their pardon is also directed toward Agrippina:

atque illi vinclis absoluti Agrippinam quoque, haud procul alio suggestu conspicuam, isdem quibus principem laudibus gratibusque venerati sunt. novum sane et moribus veterum insolitum, feminam signis Romanis praesidere: ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat. (12.37.4)

(And they, released from their chains, venerated Agrippina, too, visible not far off on another dais, with the same praises and thanksgivings with which they worshipped the *princeps*. It was very new, and unfamiliar to the customs of the ancients, that a woman should preside over the Roman standards; she herself said that she was an associate of the empire that had been created by her ancestors.)

The emphatic *ipsa semet* highlights Agrippina's own agency in taking a lofty seat equal with the emperor's, and Tacitus emphasizes how untraditional it was for a woman to preside over the military standards. Tiberius criticized Agrippina the Elder's activities with the army as a similar usurpation (1.69.4).¹⁰⁴ Agrippina, then, is inserting herself where she does not belong, replaying her mother's errors. But in this new reign, there are two key differences. Tiberius at least protested Agrippina the Elder's conduct, even if his protests were motivated mostly by malice; the weak-willed Claudius does not. And unlike her mother's activities, Agrippina's place on the dais has religious resonances. The standards themselves, over which she so shockingly presides, had religious significance,¹⁰⁵ so Agrippina is usurping not only a military, but also a cultic, position. Furthermore, she is actually being worshipped by the crowds (*venerati sunt*) in exactly the same terms as Claudius. Here, too, Claudius' lack of protest sets him apart from Tiberius, who constantly strove to keep Livia out of the cultic limelight. Claudius' failings in the realm of cult have become apparent. Despite all his focus on revivalism and cultic traditions, he does nothing to stop the worshipful treatment of himself and his wife. In retrospect, perhaps, we can appreciate the value of Tiberius: even if he did not do enough to curtail similar problems, at least he did something, whereas Claudius allows Agrippina to rise unchecked, undermining cultic memory on her way.

Not long after Nero attains the *toga virilis*, is designated consul, and has a donative given to the soldiers in his name, Agrippina "entered the Capitol in

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the objections to Plancina's similar activities (*Ann.* 2.55.6, 3.33.3, with Santoro L'Hoir 2006, 119–20). Agrippina will continue similar activities at *Ann.* 13.5.2, on which see §7.3, p. 293.

¹⁰⁵ See Ch. 2 n. 13 and references there cited.

the *carpentum*, an honor granted in ancient times to priests and sacred objects, which increased veneration of the woman” (*Ann.* 12.42.2 *carpento Capitolium ingredi, qui <hon>os sacerdotibus et sacris antiquitus concessus venerationem augebat feminae*). Use of the *carpentum* was a privilege famously granted to the Vestal Virgins,¹⁰⁶ but the vehicle sometimes provides transportation for actual sacred objects; it likens Agrippina not just to a priestess, but even a statue of a goddess.¹⁰⁷ It is possible to see Agrippina’s *carpentum* as the logical extension of the occasion when Tiberius allowed Livia to sit with the Vestals in the theater (4.16.4), and of the general tendency, present since the beginning of the principate, to venerate living emperors and other members of the Imperial family with language and cultic honors appropriate to gods or *divi*; granting the trappings of a priesthood to a member of the Imperial family has continued, and this time it is explicitly said to increase worshipful attitudes to the empress. While the worshipful treatment of the emperor that was such a problem during Tiberius’ principate is far less in evidence, this seems to be more because Claudius is a less worthy target for such attentions than because the Roman people have lost their taste for them.

The *carpentum* episode also fits in with the larger narrative patterning of *Annals* 12: Tacitus sets up an alternation of episodes in which Agrippina elevates first Nero and then herself, setting a new religious tone. Claudius’ wife and successor become the targets of veneration and cultic honors rather than the slightly bumbling emperor himself. This narrative patterning continues with the announcement of prodigies in the very next chapter of the text, immediately following Agrippina’s new honor. The placement of these prodigies, the first in the extant *Annals*, perhaps implies Agrippina is the problem: prodigies usually indicate divine anger at humans’ impious actions, and the most recent individual “violation” is Agrippina’s appropriation of the *carpentum* and the concomitant *veneratio* of her person.¹⁰⁸ This kind of attitude toward a non-god, we may think, would make the gods angry. But it is also true that Romans have done other things that could make the gods angry: a long line of “offenses” stretching back to Tiberius might have qualified. It is also difficult to understand the prodigies fully, given the fact that so much of the *Annals* is missing. We cannot tell whether Tacitus might have included prodigies in his account of the reign of Caligula, or whether this is truly the first prodigy list. If these were the first prodigies, their placement might indicate that Tacitus wants the reader to see Agrippina’s appropriation of

¹⁰⁶ See Furneaux 1907, 113 and evidence there cited.

¹⁰⁷ Koestermann 1967, 181 suggests these *sacra* would have included images such as the Palladium and the Penates. On other religious uses of the *carpentum*, see Pagnotta 1977.

¹⁰⁸ Koestermann 1967, 183 connects the prodigies to Agrippina’s growing power but does not mention the *carpentum*.

the *carpentum* as a step too far, something the gods could not ignore. Or, if there were others, these prodigies could have formed part of a larger narrative in prodigies that made Agrippina's action just one in a string of increasingly bad behaviors by members of the Imperial house. In any case, prodigies' appearance here seems to suggest once and for all that Claudius' attempts to reinvigorate Roman cultic memory will make no difference. His commitment to reviving the college of the *haruspices* appears to have been pointless, for those experts are not consulted. Likewise, his revival of the *augurium salutis* appears to have backfired; that ritual gave priests the green light to pray for the *salus* of the Roman people, but the appearance of prodigies indicating the gods' anger suggests that those prayers would not be answered.

The way Tacitus reports the prodigies gives further indications that Rome's safety has been severely jeopardized:

Multa eo anno prodigia evenere. inessum diris avibus Capitolium, crebris terrae motibus prorutae domus, ac dum latius metuitur, trepidatione vulgi invalidus quisque obtriti; frugum quoque egestas et orta ex eo fames in prodigium accipiebatur. nec occulti tantum questus, sed iura reddentem Claudium circumvasere clamoribus turbidis, pulsumque in extremam fori partem vi urgebant, donec militum globo infensos perrupit. quindecim dierum alimenta urbi, non amplius superfuisse constitit, magnaue deum benignitate et modestia hiemis rebus extremis subventum. at hercule olim Italia legionibus longinquas in provincias commeatus portabat, nec nunc infecunditate laboratur, sed Africam potius et Aegyptum exercemus, navibusque et casibus vita populi Romani permissa est.

(*Ann.* 12.43)

(Many prodigies occurred in that year. The Capitol was occupied by dire birds; houses were uprooted by frequent movements of the earth, and as fear spread more widely, the weak were crushed in the crowd's trepidation; also, a lack of grain and the famine that arose from it were received as a prodigy. Nor were there just hidden complaints about this, but as Claudius was rendering judgments, people actually surrounded him with frantic shouting, drove him into the furthest corner of the Forum, and were forcefully pressing in on him until he broke through the hostile people with the aid of a crowd of soldiers. It was agreed that there remained for the city only fifteen days' food supply—no more—and it was thanks to the gods' great kindness and the mildness of the winter that relief was provided in these extreme circumstances. But, by Hercules, at one time Italy brought supplies for its legions to far-off provinces; and we do not now suffer from infertility, but we prefer to cultivate Africa and Egypt, and the life of the Roman people has been entrusted to ships and disasters.)

The ill-omened birds settling on the Capitol, center of Rome's state cult, are a general sign of divine displeasure aimed at the state,¹⁰⁹ but the other

¹⁰⁹ Krauss 1930, 104–6; Koestermann 1967, 183.

prodigious occurrences have resonances with specific previous events in the *Annals*. The destructive earthquake that pulls down houses and buries people in the rubble recalls Claudius' figuratively shuddering house in the time of Messalina (11.28.1 *igitur domus principis inhorruerat*), its convulsion after her death (12.1.1 *convulsa principis domus*) and the turning upside down of the state when he marries Agrippina (12.7.3 *versa ex eo civitas*).¹¹⁰ The motif of the shaking or upheaval of a house as a punishment for its misdeeds is familiar from tragedy, particularly Seneca's *Thyestes*,¹¹¹ so Tacitus may be implicitly suggesting that Rome is suffering for what Claudius and his family have done. The passage also recalls the collapse of the amphitheater at Fidenae under Tiberius (4.62), whose house experienced a similar metaphorical shake-up not long before (4.52.1 *at Romae commota principis domo*), and the incident forms an important part of Tacitus' narrative of gathering doom. But Claudius' earthquake is more than just a possible or implicit manifestation of divine anger: rather than leaving the task of interpretation to his characters, Tacitus *in propria persona* applies the traditional interpretation and confirms that the earthquake is a prodigy.¹¹² That difference is an indicator of how things have changed as Rome's relationship with the gods has become worse over the course of the *Annals*: what people may once have merely suspected was a bad omen is now confirmed as such by Tacitus.

The famine afflicting Rome that is also interpreted as a prodigy (perhaps understandably, given the earthquake and the unlucky birds),¹¹³ however, is a different case. It, too, looks back to another wife-related crisis point in Claudius' principate: the fears for the grain supply prompted by the Petra brother's dream. But by inserting the famine at this point in the narrative, as other authors do not,¹¹⁴ Tacitus groups it ambiguously with the other prodigies, leaving it unclear whether the famine is really a sign of divine anger. Also ambiguous is Tacitus' language in ascribing Rome's narrow escape from disaster to the gods' kindness: it is not clear whether Tacitus himself subscribes to this view (with *subventum* standing for *subventum est*), or whether this is an interpretation of people at the time (*subventum* standing for *subventum esse*). If the latter, Tacitus perhaps implies they were misguided to attribute their rescue to divine benevolence, given the concatenation of other prodigies. The phrase *deum benignitas* has been used only once previously in the extant

¹¹⁰ Cf. Vessey 1971, 403, who connects *Ann.* 12.7.3 with the *malum publicum* of 12.5.1.

¹¹¹ Santoro L'Hoir 2006, 218, 236.

¹¹² Earthquakes were regularly viewed as prodigious: see Cic. *Div.* 1.35; Pliny *HN* 2.200; Krauss 1930, 49–53; Rosenberger 1998, 92.

¹¹³ See Obsequens 46, with Krauss 1930, 53, for earthquakes as portents of famine. See Garnsey 1988, 27 for religious reactions typical during famines.

¹¹⁴ Suet. *Claud.* 18.2; because his arrangement is not chronological, it is difficult to know which famine is meant. Dio 59.17.2, 60.33.10 mentions food shortages at the beginning and end of Claudius' reign, but not in AD 51. Neither author connects food shortages with prodigies.

Annals, by Claudius himself, who, with similar naiveté, spoke of the gods' kindness while re-establishing the college of the haruspices as Messalina committed adultery behind his back (*Ann.* 11.15.2). On the other hand, if the assertion of *deum benignitas* is Tacitus speaking *in propria persona*, he seems to indicate that even in a time of prodigies signifying problems in the Imperial *domus*, the gods are capable of being kind to Rome as a whole and of giving Claudius a (perhaps undeserved) reprieve from the popular unrest caused by the famine. If even now the gods are kind, perhaps the reader should reconsider Claudius' earlier deployment of the phrase *benignitas deum*: perhaps he is not so naive after all, and perhaps it was not so foolish to spend time reviving the haruspices and preserving other religious details. Even so, the final sentence of *Ann.* 12.43, in which Tacitus laments Rome's dependence on foreign grain, suggests the historian sees it as an inherent vulnerability in the Roman people. Implicitly, then, even the gods' benevolence is exercised in a dark context where Rome is under constant threat of famine.¹¹⁵ Thus the very first time prodigies are introduced in the extant *Annals*, they are already difficult to interpret. They are both clear, in that they are a warning from the gods, and unclear, in that it is difficult to determine how broadly that warning applies.

Despite these dire prodigies, in the following year nothing changes in the pattern of condemnations, Claudius' problematic antiquarianism, and Agrippina's destructiveness. Furius Scribonianus is exiled for consulting astrologers about Claudius' death (*Ann.* 12.52.1 *quasi finem principis per Chaldaeos scrutaretur*).¹¹⁶ Claudius claims credit for *clementia* because he merely exiles Scribonianus instead of having him executed, and also mentions his lenient treatment of Scribonianus' father Camillus, who had been part of an attempted coup (12.52.2). Tacitus' narrative of the conspiracy of Camillus senior (AD 42)¹¹⁷ is unfortunately lost, making it difficult to assess the valence of its mention now. But Claudius' assertion of clemency—he could have executed the son for the crimes of his father, as Tiberius did Sejanus' children (5.9), but did not, or at least not immediately¹¹⁸—recalls the altar of *clementia* vowed for Sejanus and Tiberius after Titus Sabinus' killing (4.74.2) in its similarly egregious euphemism. Claudius does not receive as servile a religious response as Tiberius did; similar condemnations prompted religious flattery

¹¹⁵ I owe this point to D. Levene.

¹¹⁶ *Quasi* is equivalent to "on the ground that" (Furneaux 1907, 125) and does not necessarily signify that Tacitus disbelieved the alleged consultation.

¹¹⁷ On the conspiracy, see Levick 1978b, 99; Levick 1990, 59–61. Scribonianus' father was an enemy of Messalina's, executed after Narcissus dreamed that he slew Claudius (Dio 60.14.4). The dream may have been Dio's invention; Suetonius (*Claud.* 13.2, 35.2) does not mention it.

¹¹⁸ Furneaux 1907, 126. The uncertain circumstances of Scribonianus' death (*Ann.* 12.52.2) also echo those of his father: he may have either committed suicide (Dio 60.15.3), or been killed by a soldier named Volaginius (*Hist.* 2.75.3; see Ash 2007a, 289).

and prayer to Tiberius as if he were a god (2.30.4, 2.32.2, 3.22.2), but there is no such tendency here. Perhaps the Roman people have improved their behavior, or perhaps the bumbling Claudius is simply not deemed worthy of such veneration. Tacitus also notes that “a harsh and ineffective decree of the Senate was made to expel astrologers from Italy” (12.52.3 *de mathematicis Italia pellendis factum senatus consultum atrox et inritum*). This recalls the nearly identical language Tacitus used to describe a similar Tiberian decree (2.32.3 *facta et de mathematicis magisque Italia pellendis senatus consulta*); the repetition, and the adjective *inritum*, suggest the Senate’s ineffectiveness. Little has changed since the Lollia Paulina episode, or since Claudius’ assertion that foreign religious practices are undermining Roman cultic memory. The condemnation of Scribonianus suggests otherwise, as do the prodigies paired with Agrippina’s new honors; Claudius and his subjects would do better to focus on these issues than on cruel persecutions of astrologers.

But the spate of accusations continues unabated. Early in Tacitus’ account of the next year, he reports yet another trial on grounds of magic (*magicas superstitiones*), which appears to have formed the bulk of the *res repetundae* case against Statilius Taurus (*Ann.* 12.59.1). The nature of the religious practice is never specified,¹¹⁹ but the driving force behind it is a familiar one: Agrippina. She is motivated by a desire for Statilius Taurus’ gardens (12.59.1 *hortis eius inhians*), recalling Messalina’s condemnation of Valerius Asiaticus (11.1.1 *hortis inhians*).¹²⁰ Even with a new empress, Claudius’ wives still cause the deaths of Roman citizens for the same trivial motives, using similar supernatural tools. This represents an intensification of the problem whose beginning Tacitus chronicled under Tiberius: entrapping people using charges of magical practices or astrology is not a new phenomenon, yet now it is actually members of the Imperial family who are doing the entrapping, including *both* of Claudius’ wives. Furthermore, Claudius does not stop this from happening; at least Tiberius tried. So Claudius’ attempts to revive long-forgotten aspects of Roman cultic memory can do nothing to change the other religious problems of the principate; those long-established patterns may get worse, but they do not seem capable of improvement.

Claudius’ interest in ancient religious details not only fails to help improve Rome’s religious climate; its openness to manipulation can actually make things worse, as becomes clear in an encounter between Claudius and his doctor Xenophon about the latter’s home town of Cos:

Rettulit dein de immunitate Cois tribuenda multaque super antiquitate eorum memoravit: Argivos vel Coeum Latonae parentem vetustissimos insulae cultores;

¹¹⁹ Possibilities include Christian sympathies (Koestermann 1967, 210) or Pythagoreanism (Claridge 2010, 387–8: an underground basilica sometimes interpreted as a place of neo-Pythagorean worship was located near his gardens).

¹²⁰ See Vessey 1971, 407; Seif 1973, 228; Rutledge 2001, 109.

mox adventu Aesculapii artem medendi inlatam maximeque inter posteros eius celebrem fuisse, nomina singulorum referens et quibus quisque aetatibus viguissent. quin etiam dixit Xenophontem, cuius scientia ipse uteretur, eadem familia ortum, precibusque eius dandum ut omni tributo vacui in posterum Coi sacram et tantum dei ministram insulam colerent. neque dubium habetur multa eorundem in populum Romanum merita sociasque victorias potuisse tradi: sed Claudius facilitate solita quod uni concesserat nullis extrinsecus adiumentis velavit.

(*Ann.* 12.61)

(Claudius then made a motion about granting immunity to the Coans, and noted many things about their antiquity: either the Argives or Coeus, the father of Latona, had been the earliest inhabitants of the island; in due course, he said, the art of healing was brought in with the advent of Aesculapius, and was especially celebrated among his descendants. He referred to the names of individuals and the eras in which each had thrived. Indeed, he actually said that Xenophon, whose skill he himself made use of, was born of the same family, and that he had to grant the man's prayers that the Coans, free of all tribute for the future, should cultivate their island that was sacred and served such a great god. Now let there be no doubt that he could have discussed their many benefactions to the Roman people and victories in which they were our allies; but Claudius used no extraneous means of assistance to conceal what he had, in his usual obligingness, granted to one person.)

The episode recalls the Tiberian embassies from Greek states requesting honors using argumentation based in cultic memory and/or a history of a good relationship with Rome.¹²¹ Very similar arguments are made here: the mythological or protohistorical ancestry of the people of Cos is mentioned, as is their perpetuation of the art of medicine, first given to them by a god.¹²² But these arguments are spoken not by representatives of Cos, but by the emperor himself. Compared with the Tiberian examples, when the states' arguments were neither answered conclusively by the Senate, nor, in some cases, grounded in a thorough commitment to maintaining the continuity of cultic memory, it is laudable that Claudius allows the Coans to focus on their local cult. But it is troubling that the emperor is making arguments that the Coans should be making for themselves, especially given Tacitus' negative judgment of the *facilitas* that allows Claudius to be manipulated by his doctor.¹²³ The *scientia* of Xenophon which Claudius claims to be using is probably his medical knowledge, but in this context it could also refer to Xenophon's special

¹²¹ *Ann.* 3.60–3, 4.14, 4.43, and 4.55–6; on these episodes, see §3.4; §4.3, pp. 174–5; §4.5, pp. 192–3 and 198–9.

¹²² For claims of mythological ancestry, cf. *Ann.* 4.43.2, 4.55.3, and 4.56.1. The Coans' preservation of Aesculapius' arts is similar to the Ephesians' insistence that they have maintained a right of asylum since it was first acknowledged by Liber (3.61.2).

¹²³ On Tacitus' criticism, see Seif 1973, 229.

familiarity with the myths of his native cult.¹²⁴ Perhaps we are to imagine the doctor pouring tales of Aesculapius into the ears of an emperor known to be receptive to stories about the details of religious practice, the more ancient, the better. This suggests that Claudius' antiquarian bent, while reasonably positive when it leads to the preservation of cultic memory at Rome, can be abused by insalubrious characters. Furthermore, the word *precibus* suggests that Xenophon entreated Claudius as if he were a god; in fact *colerent*, describing the Coans' worship of Aesculapius, is syntactically dependent on *precibus*... *dandum*, which refers to Xenophon's "prayers" to Claudius. This shows that even if there has been no actual cult given to Claudius in his lifetime, the modes of interaction that characterize emperor cult have become so ingrained that emperors' underlings often end up "praying" to them, even in situations where the discussion is about cults of the "regular" gods. This worshipful language is particularly sinister here, given Tacitus' insinuation that the doctor would help the emperor along to death (and subsequent deification) the very next year (12.67.2):¹²⁵ Xenophon will literally make Claudius a god soon enough.

Another key difference between the Tiberian embassies and Claudius' Coans is the nature of what is being sought: instead of arguing for special rights to be granted to their ancient cults, what the Coans want is tax relief. This seems to open the floodgates. In the very next chapter, Tacitus describes how the people of Byzantium begin complaining about their own tax burdens before the Senate, also using religious language: they "pray to be rid of" (*Ann.* 12.62.1 *deprecarentur*) their burdens, a sentiment Tacitus echoes in ring composition at the end of his account of their appeal (12.63.3 *orabant*). Tacitus recounts the circumstances of the city's foundation. Its location was chosen based on an oracle from Pythian Apollo, who told them to seek the "seat of the blind," a reference to the people of Chalcedon who had foolishly built their city on the side of the Bosphorus whose lands and seas are less fertile (12.63.1–2). But Byzantium's prosperity did not hold:

unde primo quaestuosi et opulenti; post magnitudine onerum urgente finem aut modum orabant, adnitente principe, qui Thraecio Bosporanoque bello recens fessos iuvandosque rettulit. ita tributa in quinquennium remissa. (12.63.3)

(From this [choice of location] at first they became successful and wealthy; later, as the magnitude of their burdens pressed upon them, they prayed for an end or limit, with the *princeps* working to support them, saying that they were exhausted because of the recent Thracian and Bosporan war, and should be helped. And so their taxes were remitted for a period of five years.)

¹²⁴ Epigraphical evidence from Cos indicates that Xenophon, in addition to being doctor to the Imperial house, was also a priest of Aesculapius (Smallwood 1967, 252; Sherk 1988, 49 B).

¹²⁵ Koestermann 1967, 215; Vessey 1971, 407; Seif 1973, 230.

Byzantium's arguments rest on past services to the Romans ever since the Macedonian wars, much as the Spartans' and Messenians' had done (4.43). They do not emphasize cultic memory, as Xenophon does when arguing for Cos; it is Tacitus in his own voice who tells us the story of the foundation oracle. Nevertheless, despite not appealing to Claudius' particular interest in the histories of cults, they, too, get tax relief, for reasons entirely different from those cited by the Byzantines themselves; we may wonder how much their prayers may have had something to do with it. Even under Claudius, then, none of the problems with such embassies that existed under Tiberius have dissipated, and meanwhile, the example of Cos has shown that the emperor is open to being manipulated. But Tacitus' remark on the Delphic oracle is not without purpose, even if the ambassadors from Byzantium do not use it in their argument: Tacitus may mean to imply that Byzantium has somehow squandered a prosperity that was granted to them by the god. Given the issue of Rome's grain supply and the kindness of the gods that has cropped up during Claudius' reign, the reader may wonder if Rome is putting itself in a similar position when it squanders the gods' goodwill by failing to respond to signs of divine anger.

Another spate of prodigies follows immediately:

M. Asinio M'. Acilio consulibus mutationem rerum in deterius portendi cognitum est crebris prodigiis. signa ac tentoria militum igne caelesti arsere; fastigio Capitolii examen apium inedit; biformis hominum partus et suis fetum editum cui accipitrum unguis inessent. numerabatur inter ostenta deminutus omnium magistratuum numerus, quaestore, aedili, tribuno ac praetore et consule paucos intra mensis defunctis. (*Ann.* 12.64.1)

(In the consulship of M. Asinius and M'. Acilius, thanks to frequent prodigies it was understood that a change of affairs for the worse was being indicated. The standards and tents burned with heavenly fire; a swarm of bees occupied the rooftop of the Capitolium; there were two-formed human births; and a sow's offspring was born with hawks' talons. A diminished number of all magistrates was also counted among the portents, when the quaestor, aedile, tribune, praetor, and consul all died within a few months.)

Tacitus marked a turn for the worse before, in AD 23 (4.6.1), preceded by an observation that *deum ira* had fallen upon the Roman people (4.1.2). But whereas that pronouncement was available solely to the reader and was not accompanied by any prodigies that would have informed the characters within Tacitus' text about the gods' anger, this time the signs of the gods' displeasure are clear. Yet no one in Claudian Rome reacts to the prodigies in any real way, for example, by trying to expiate them. This lackluster response recalls people's tone-deafness in trying to argue that Rome is experiencing *benignitas deum* (12.43.2) despite signs to the contrary during the last prodigy list. Furthermore, no one attempts to identify what terrible event(s) the prodigies might be

pointing to; the most obvious upcoming catastrophe is Claudius' death later that same year, but the prodigies Tacitus enumerates can also be interpreted as relating to Nero's succession. The military *signa ac tentoria* that appear to catch fire might signify that the soldiers will soon pass into the hand of a new emperor, an eventuality which will be fulfilled when Nero is presented to the Praetorian Guard after Claudius' death (12.69.1–2).¹²⁶ The blazing standards look backward, too, as well as forward: Agrippina recently presided over the standards (12.37.4), a mark of her problematic veneration. Swarms of bees like the one settling on the Capitoline were most often viewed as negative.¹²⁷ Their settling on the Capitoline has a much more obviously religious resonance than do bees in Livy,¹²⁸ which typically appear in the Forum, or in Dio, where they settle in a military camp (60.35.1). By placing the bees at Rome's most important center of civic cult, Tacitus implies that the relationship between the city and its gods continues to suffer. Indeed, ill-omened birds settled on the Capitol in AD 51, part of another set of prodigies that were never expiated. This element of repetition suggests that the Romans are not paying proper ritual attention to signs sent by the gods and therefore failing to correct the problem, meaning that Rome will continue to suffer.

This suffering seems likely to extend to Nero's reign, for the prodigies involving unusual births can be read as pointing forward to him specifically. Unusual births are a traditional theme of prodigies,¹²⁹ but they have particular resonance here. The ambiguous word *biformis* could indicate that the babies were "two-headed," "hermaphrodite," or "part-animal, part-human."¹³⁰ They prefigure the two-headed human and animal births that appear in AD 64 as a sign of Nero's sacrilege following the fire in Rome (*Ann.* 15.47.1 *bicipites hominum aliorumve animalium partus*), and two-facedness is a particularly apt metaphor for this duplicitous slayer of his mother. Similarly, while deformed piglets are also a semi-regular feature of official prodigies,¹³¹ the piglet with talons may also be meant to make the reader think specifically of Nero: sharp claws appearing on an unexpected animal also resonates with the presence of such murderous tendencies in a son, who is not expected to violate familial *pietas* as Nero will do.

¹²⁶ There will be a similar omen during Nero's principate, when the spears of Paetus' soldiers appear to catch fire (*Ann.* 15.7.2); on the passage, see Aveline 2004, 464.

¹²⁷ Positive: Cic. *Div.* 1.73, with Wardle 2006, 286. Negative: Cic. *Har. resp.* 25; Walsh 1985, 210; MacInnes 2000 and the examples there cited (including incidents foretelling the battles of Cannae, Pharsalus, and Philippi). Ambiguous: Pliny *HN* 11.55, Virg. *Aen.* 7.64ff. with Horsfall 2000, 87.

¹²⁸ Bees signified Hannibal's success (Livy 21.46.1) and boded ill for Marcellus (Livy 27.23.2); cf. Krauss 1930, 115–16; Levene 1993, 47 and 63. Bees are also reported at Livy 24.10.11.

¹²⁹ See Krauss 1930, 129–30; MacBain 1982, 127–34 (on intersex human births).

¹³⁰ Furneaux 1907, 142.

¹³¹ For examples, see Krauss 1930, 126.

Any reader of Tacitus would certainly know that Nero's reign would be disastrous and might already have made the connection between these prodigies and that dark period in Rome's history; the correspondences between the prodigies in AD 54 and those in the reign of Nero would become fully apparent once the reader reached the Neronian books of the *Annals*. But for those living at the time of Claudius, the connections might not have been so obvious until *after* Nero's accession. In fact, from the time of the Secular Games, Tacitus' Romans have been keen to see *praesagia* of Nero's rise to power only in a positive way, in the context of popular favor toward him. To connect these dire prodigies with this newly adopted heir, the people's darling, grandson of Germanicus, is not necessarily an obvious move. Only the reader, with the benefit of hindsight, is able to understand the portents fully. Tacitus' *cognitum est* certainly implies some understanding on the part of contemporary Romans, while *numerabatur* similarly suggests that the other prodigies are what influenced people to interpret the many magistrates' deaths as prodigious, too.¹³² Certainly the death of one of nearly every type of magistrate suggests that the entire state is on the point of metaphorical death, and people at the time could see this even if they did not attach this doom appropriately to Nero's accession. So prodigies provide the reader with valuable information about Rome's religious trajectory, by signifying that the gods are angry and suggesting how that anger may manifest itself in the future, or by giving occasional hints about the reason for their anger. For the characters, on the other hand, some insight is possible (the recognition that things are changing for the worse), but there does not appear to be any possibility of truly correcting Rome's course. The fact that the first set of prodigies was not expiated, and then was followed by a second set, suggests that Claudius' subjects are cognizant enough of Rome's religious traditions to recognize prodigies when they occur, but not sufficiently steeped in those traditions to know how to correct the larger problems they signify.

A good example of this ignorance is the reaction of Agrippina: immediately after the prodigy list, Tacitus tells us that she is afraid (*Ann.* 12.64.2). It is not the prodigies that terrify her, but Claudius' drunken remark about the fate (12.64.2 *fatale*) he suffers from his wives. The relationship Tacitus may have meant the reader to see between Agrippina's appropriation of the *carpentum* and the first set of prodigies makes it particularly ironic, though not surprising, that she shows these prodigies such little regard. If her behavior is one of the reasons the gods are angry at Rome, there is no sign that she will address the situation. Claudius' remark reveals his ignorance, too: he sees "fate" only as it relates to his wives. It is true that Agrippina will have a large role to play in

¹³² It is unclear whether Tacitus himself endorses this interpretation.

his fate (in the sense of his death); but he shows no sign of awareness that these prodigies indicate a supernatural level of causation. We would expect someone so obsessed with perpetuating Roman cultic memory—especially someone who revived the college of the haruspices—to be better attuned to the meaning, potential consequences, and expiation of prodigies that were a major focus of Rome’s age-old cultic traditions. Although the gods have now sent two sets of prodigies, no one in Rome, least of all members of the Imperial family, pays attention.

Indeed, Agrippina continues her pattern of using charges of religious deviance to attack her rivals, this time going after Nero’s aunt Domitia Lepida “for womanly reasons” (*Ann.* 12.64.2 *muliebribus causis*) and accusing Domitia of casting spells against her (12.65.1 *quod coniugem principis devotionibus petivisset*). This is another step along the road that began with Libo Drusus’ trial; the employment of *devotiones* against Germanicus were similarly among the accusations against Piso (3.13.2), when they formed a relatively small part of the accusation. Now they are taken much more seriously.¹³³ The incident also differs from Agrippina’s similar accusations of Lollia or Scribonianus, accused of using magic or forbidden forms of divination to enquire about Claudius; now Agrippina herself claims to be the target of these curses. This suggests that Claudius is already out of the picture before he has even died, and is another way in which Agrippina is taking center stage. Similarly, Narcissus, in opposing the death penalty for Domitia Lepida, turns not to Claudius to stop Agrippina, but to Britannicus, “stretch[ing] his hands now towards the gods, now towards Britannicus himself” (12.65.3 *modo ad deos, modo ad ipsum tendere manus*) and entreating him to “take vengeance on his mother’s killers” (*matris etiam interfectores ulcisceretur*). Tacitus’ language recalls Libo’s prayerful appeals to Tiberius, and Narcissus’ focus on vengeance recalls Tiberian rhetoric, too.¹³⁴ Narcissus perhaps thinks Claudius is so ineffective an emperor that “praying” to him to stop Agrippina would be useless, and applies the same rhetoric of prayer to the next most appropriate member of the Imperial family. Again, nothing has improved since the days of Tiberius, despite the clear warnings that the gods have sent notifying humans of their displeasure. As Claudius’ reign lurches to its close, we see Rome mired in the same old problems, which have only intensified, if they have changed at all. Claudius’ interest in cultic memory has ultimately been futile: his attempts to revive old-fashioned religiosity among the Romans do not bear any long-term fruit, and his own failure to recognize the gods’ anger indicates that his interest in religion is superficial, or misdirected.

¹³³ Koestermann 1967, 221.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Ann.* 2.29.2. For *ultio*, see *Ann.* 3.19.2, 4.15.3, with §3.2, p. 137 and §4.6, pp. 175–7.

6.6 DEATH, ASTROLOGY, AND DEIFICATION

Tacitus' references to religious activity during and immediately after Claudius' death display further continuities with the reign of Tiberius, but in a way that puts particular focus on the role of cult and the gods in the succession of emperors. Just as the second set of prodigies can be seen to indicate Nero as the "change for the worse" that Tacitus identifies, the way he uses religious material in the rest of the book similarly suggests that the coming change of regime will be an unpleasant one. During Claudius' final illness, for example, while Agrippina and Xenophon the doctor are ensuring Claudius' death, the Senate prays for his recovery: "Meanwhile the Senate was called, and the consuls and priests made vows for the *princeps*' safety" (*Ann.* 12.68.1 *vocabatur interim senatus votaue pro incolumitate principis consules et sacerdotes nuncupabant*). The procedure looks quite traditional: *votum nuncupare* is a technical phrase taken from sacral law, used only here in the *Annals*.¹³⁵ There is no implication, as there was when various priests competed to commemorate Livia's recovery from illness (3.64.3–4),¹³⁶ that anything ritually inappropriate is being done. The Senate upholds traditional forms of prayer, little knowing that they can do no good, since Agrippina is hiding the fact that Claudius is already dead: "She frequently divulged that the *princeps*' health was improving, so that the soldiers would be of good hope and the favorable moment, in accordance with the Chaldaeans' warnings, would have a chance to arrive" (12.68.3 *crebroque vulgabat ire in melius valetudinem principis, quo miles bona in spe ageret tempusque prosperum ex monitis Chaldaeorum adventaret*).

This is the first we hear in the narrative that Agrippina has consulted astrologers, evidently about the moment of her husband's death and her son's accession. This revelation demonstrates her hypocrisy: she saw Lollia Paulina and Scribonianus condemned for consulting astrologers about Claudius' death, but we now learn that she has done exactly the same. It also has the effect of setting the traditional, public rituals of the Senate, consuls, and priests at odds with Agrippina's private religious activities. A form of divination that Tacitus would have us see as foreign and dubious, if potent, leads Agrippina to dissemble that Claudius is still alive, rendering the Senate's "mainstream" prayers futile before they are even made. This is a striking proof of the effect that the rise of astrology within the Imperial family, beginning with Tiberius' secret study of the art, has had on Rome's cultic traditions: horoscopes are taken, while prodigies are ignored.

¹³⁵ Koestermann 1967, 227. *Nuncupare* alone is used only four other times in Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.17.2; *Ann.* 2.48, 3.71, 16.11).

¹³⁶ On the passage, see §3.5, pp. 160–3.

The fact that Agrippina's consultation of astrologers is mentioned only now is narratologically important in another way: it firmly grounds Nero's accession in the problems that have persisted ever since Tiberius' reign. This is probably the same horoscope predicting Nero's rule that Tacitus mentioned at *Ann.* 6.22.4; Tacitus' promise to tell us more in due time (6.22.4 *in tempore memorabitur*) seems to look forward to 14.9.3, when we learn that unnamed astrologers predicted not only that Nero would rule, but that he would murder Agrippina.¹³⁷ The detail here about the "proper time" for Nero's accession was likely part of the same consultation of astrologers by Agrippina, who, in addition to asking whether her son would rule, would probably also have asked when this would occur.¹³⁸ All three passages, therefore, may well refer to the same consultation of astrologers, or to several consultations made by Agrippina over a period of time. We have, therefore, one astrological consultation (or set of consultations on a similar theme) discussed at three different points over the course of the *Annals*. Unlike Dio, who reports the prophecy that Nero would become emperor and kill his mother but relates both elements together at the start of Nero's reign (61.2.1), Tacitus spreads out elements of the prediction over all three hexads of the *Annals* to make a profound statement about the nature of the Imperial succession. We are first told of the prediction about Nero near the end of Tiberius' principate, a period so tainted with astrology that even the *princeps* himself practices it, predicting Galba's distant rule while failing to make any more immediate, terrestrial arrangements for the succession that could have prevented Caligula from taking power. Only when Claudius is dead and Nero about to ascend to the throne do we hear that Agrippina made a similar consultation about her son: astrology in the hands of the scheming Agrippina this time, rather than the *princeps* himself, determined who would rule next. And finally, when Agrippina herself has died and we learn the deadly outcome that was predicted for her schemes, we will see the fatal consequences of such meddling. By using astrology to remind the reader of Nero's eventual accession already during his account of Tiberius' reign, Tacitus once again dispenses insight that was not available to Romans alive during the reign of Tiberius. Both the prodigies and the astrologers foretold what people at the time could not see, or (in Agrippina's case) chose not to reveal.

Claudius' deification encourages the reader to think back even further, to Augustus' deification at the very beginning of Tiberius' reign: "Heavenly honors were decreed to Claudius, and the rite of a funeral was celebrated in the same way as for divine Augustus, with Agrippina rivalling the magnificence of her

¹³⁷ See §5.5, p. 229.

¹³⁸ Horary astrology, which involved determining the best moment to take a certain action, was frequently used by court astrologers to find the optimal timing for a coronation; see Barton 1994a, 47, 49, 67–8.

great-grandmother Livia" (*Ann.* 12.69.3 *caelestesque honores Claudio decernuntur et funeris sollemne perinde ac divo Augusto celebratur, aemulante Agrippina proaviae Liviae magnificentiam*). The phrasing is identical to 1.10.8 (*templum et caelestes religiones decernuntur*), except that no temple for Claudius is mentioned.¹³⁹ Augustus' consecration led immediately into prayers to Tiberius (1.11.1), and Claudius' deification is similarly followed by the granting of honors to Agrippina. When the details of the priesthood of Claudius are discussed at the beginning of *Annals* 13,¹⁴⁰ it is after honors are heaped (13.2.3 *cumulabantur*) upon Agrippina. Claudius' deification is described as an honor granted to his wife: his priests, funeral, and deification appear tacked on almost as an afterthought after mention of Agrippina's lictors and the institution of *optima mater* as a military password. Claudius' principate has changed something in the tenor of the Imperial cult. His divinity does not, like that of Augustus, encourage divine treatment of his successor Nero, but rather, encourages elevation of Agrippina, honored with two lictors and a flamine of the new god (13.2.3); she will be the authority visibly and publicly responsible for his cultic commemoration. None of this implies that the deification was not taken seriously by Tacitus' Senate,¹⁴¹ but rather, indicates that Agrippina is using the fact that it *was* taken seriously for her own gain. Claudius, to whom few prayed while he lived, will be venerated foremost by the scheming wife who manipulated him in life.

Tacitus also invites us to compare this moment with the first principate by comparing Agrippina and Livia; this resonates with Tacitus' complex web of verbal allusions throughout the *Annals* linking Agrippina and Livia, making it textually clear that Agrippina has been successful in her attempt to imitate Livia.¹⁴² But Agrippina outstrips her historical model, since Tacitus states explicitly that she poisoned Claudius (*Ann.* 12.66), whereas in Livia's case he reports only suspicions that she was involved in Augustus' death (1.5.1).¹⁴³ Agrippina's violence shows the extent to which past behavior by members of the Imperial family (especially women) has created dangerous precedents for their successors. Livia is an equally dangerous precedent in terms of cultic memory. Part of Livia's "magnificence" was her close links with the Imperial cult, both as a highly visible cultic commemorator of her husband the *divus* (e.g. 3.64.2) and as the beneficiary of special prayers and rituals performed by the Augustales and others (e.g. 3.64.3–4).¹⁴⁴ Agrippina has now surpassed

¹³⁹ This would not actually be dedicated until the reign of Vespasian (Suet. *Claud.* 45, *Vesp.* 9.1; see Griffin 1994, 312; Hurley 2001, 241–2).

¹⁴⁰ On the timeline of Claudius' death and deification, see Fishwick 2002, 345–9.

¹⁴¹ So Koestermann 1967, 237.

¹⁴² Martin 1955; Santoro L'Hoir 2006, 22, 48–50.

¹⁴³ Goodyear 1972, 131; *contra* Furneaux 1896, 186 and Martin 1955, 126, who believe *scelus* at 1.5.1 must refer specifically to poisoning (cf. Dio 56.30.2).

¹⁴⁴ It would be interesting to know what Tacitus (if anything) made of the fact that it was under Claudius that Livia finally received deification, in AD 41 (Dio 60.5.2).

Livia's achievements by becoming Claudius' *flaminica* (whereas membership in the *Augustales* was limited to male relatives of Augustus, *Ann.* 1.54.1), and by appropriating cultic honors (e.g. the *carpentum*), both for her own aggrandizement.

6.7 CONCLUSIONS

The surviving fragment of Tacitus' account of Claudius' principate establishes it as a distinct entity, as well as an important bridge that connects the uncertainty of Tiberius' reign and the impiety of Nero's. Certainly the loss of *Annals* 7–10 creates difficulties for the approach and structure of my analysis, which owes much to considerations of the juxtaposition and ordering of religious material within Tacitus' narrative. The issue of Claudius' relationship with emperor cult is particularly decontextualized by this lacuna, and it remains unclear how Claudius compares with what has immediately preceded him (Caligula). But in comparison to the Tiberian books, *Annals* 11–12 contain hardly any instances when the emperor himself is the focus of worshipful language or gestures. When these do occur, Claudius does nothing to stop them, as Tiberius had at least tried to do; how to handle worshipful subjects is one of many things of which Claudius remains ignorant. By including so few indications of worshipful treatment, perhaps Tacitus means to imply that the incompetent Claudius was not seen by his subjects as deserving of cultic honors within his own lifetime. When he is cultically commemorated after his death, that has more to do with Agrippina and Nero than it does with Claudius' merits. This shows on the one hand how ingrained emperor cult has become, regardless of any abuses by Caligula that Tacitus may have chronicled. Whereas Tiberius demurred, by the time of Claudius' principate, becoming a *divus* seems more or less automatic, an important index of the insidious creep of cultic commemoration. But Agrippina's abuses show the real extent of the problem. All previous *principes*, in failing to delimit clear boundaries between what was appropriate in the Imperial cult and what was not, failed to curb cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial house. This leaves the system open for abuses, and we have seen numerous examples in the *Annals* of people being commemorated in ways they should not. Taking this to its logical extreme, Tacitus shows us a wife murdering her husband and then gaining prestige from his deification.

In terms of the "new" form of cultic memory that began with the deification of Augustus, then, the Claudian books show an increasingly dark picture. What about in the realm of traditional Roman religion? Despite the loss of so much of the Claudian books, from what survives the reader can still emerge with a relatively clear impression of Tacitus' view of his reign from the perspective of cult. Above all, Claudius' old-fashioned nature is a major

focus of Tacitus' account, embracing example after example of his antiquarian interest in the most ancient and traditional religious details of Roman culture. Despite the dupe of his wives and freedman, Claudius can at least assert his own agency in the area of religion. These attempts at cultic revivalism are praiseworthy, and Tacitus makes sure to enumerate without (obvious) criticism Claudius' celebration of the Secular Games, revival of the haruspices and *augurium Salutis*, and extension of the *pomerium*. But these incidents become problematic in that they represent a form of escapism: they distract Claudius from things that arguably have a better claim on his attention. And it is not only from the government of his empire that cultic antiquarianism serves as a distraction. Claudius' focus on the preservation or revivification of cultic memory is a problem even from a religious point of view, since his tunnel vision seems to prevent him from spotting and correcting abuses of ritual committed elsewhere by his wives.

This is not merely a case of Claudius doing some things (religion) well and other things (controlling his wives) poorly. Claudius' antiquarian tendencies, while in a way very laudable, do not simply fail to generate positive and pervasive change in how the Romans relate to their gods; they actually can make that relationship even worse. Claudius' episodes of enthusiasm for cultic memory sometimes carry the seeds of their own undoing. The Secular Games, for instance, are mostly significant for the prominence they grant to Nero, the murderous *princeps*-to-be and most impious of the Julio-Claudians. While they may revive an ancient custom, the games are also the introit to an even more irreligious chapter in Rome's history. We can also question the long-term effectiveness of Claudius' revivals. Claudius himself does not consult the haruspices after reviving them, even when visited by prodigies, and Tacitus' description of his enlargement of the *pomerium* suggests the impermanence of that addition within cultic memory in the future. Furthermore, Claudius' principle of ritual conservatism or revivalism is inconsistently applied, as we see in his punctilious attention to sacrifices in Ostia paired with blissful ignorance of Messalina's growing ritual abuses, or the incestuous marriage to Agrippina, where Claudius ignores the ritual consequences of his own desires but ritually expiates the alleged incest of his enemy. This antiquarian emperor and apparent traditionalist, then, is happy enough to break with ritual tradition when it suits him. Claudius' interest in tradition is imperfect, and the gaps he leaves are wide enough for divine anger to slip through.

Furthermore, Claudius' revivalism is individual, not communal; he also fails to generate a broader interest in religious traditions within Roman society. There are no voices for cultic memory in society aside from the emperor himself. And so, when Claudius goes against a religious tradition, no other opinions are expressed. Even when dissent exists, it is not expressed constructively. So even to the extent that Claudius wants to move toward a more traditional vision of Rome that respects cultic memory, the rest of society is

unprepared to follow him. This more than anything else is an indicator of the damage the principate has done. The people of Rome have imbibed the spirit of change from their emperors. Even if the alterations to cultic memory that we saw take place under Tiberius were not always problematic in each individual instance, the larger cultural shift they represented—a shift away from cultural memory as the driving principle, away from the time-honored idea that following tradition is the best way to keep the gods happy—now manifests itself in a population that is increasingly ignorant of, and unconcerned with, maintaining that human–divine relationship.

Claudius tries to preserve cultic memory by looking further back into Rome's religious past than Tiberius ever did. But by problematizing the nature of the cultic memory Claudius is able to create, Tacitus shows that these antiquarian tendencies will ultimately be fruitless. Tacitus' memorializations of Claudius, then, are also memorializations of the problematic nature of memory itself and the potential for the efforts of even the most conscientious, memory-oriented emperor the Julio-Claudian line is able to produce to be forgotten forever. Meanwhile, the prodigies that begin to insert themselves into the Claudian narrative show that Claudius' sincere, if ultimately fruitless, attempts to put Rome on the right track with her gods will ultimately not repair the broken *pax deorum*. In this, Claudius' reign provides a bridge between the reign of Tiberius, when the foundations of cultic memory begin to shake, and its catastrophic failure under Nero.

Nero

A Narrative in Prodigies

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Nero's succession heralds the beginning of a new and unprecedentedly dark epoch in Rome's cultic history. We see neglect of traditional cult matters, and even outright impieties, on the part of the emperor and others in his court; in particular, the competing impieties of Nero and Agrippina continue after Claudius' reign and set the tone for Neronian Rome. In the realm of Imperial cult, the tendency to flatter the emperor with worshipful treatment not only continues, but intensifies to unforeseen levels. In this respect, Nero's reign is a step back in time, more similar to (although far more pronounced than) the *adulatio* that began to emerge under Tiberius than to the period of comparative restraint under Claudius. The gods manifest their anger at these developments by sending continual prodigies, but the divine wrath they express seems by now incapable of expiation even when humans are able to recognize it. In retrospect, therefore, it becomes clear that Claudius' biggest mistake in the realm of cult was to allow Nero's reign to happen; even if Claudius' diligent preservation or revival of ancient cult practice had actually improved Rome's relationship with the gods, any progress (of which there was precious little in any case) would surely be undone by Nero's extreme impieties. Yet although Nero's errors are extreme, they are different from what has preceded mainly in degree rather than kind. Even his most egregious acts of negligence and sacrilege have their antecedents in what has come before under Tiberius and Claudius; this does not so much suggest that Nero is a blameless sufferer for the sins of his fathers as it shows that the principate's evolution has only intensified the problems in Roman cultic memory that have existed since its beginning.

7.2 KIN MURDER AND DIVINE WRATH I: BRITANNICUS

Nero's impiety quickly becomes obvious in *Annals* 13–14 thanks to a series of kin murders. The conflicts with Agrippina that begin his reign (as early as *Ann.* 13.5) will end in Nero's decision to murder her; but his first impiety, which Tacitus strongly suggests draws down the wrath of the gods, involves Britannicus. Nero's poisoning of his adopted brother "suggests his monstrous side"¹ and allows Tacitus to introduce into his account of the new principate at a very early point the idea of ritual pollution arising from serious transgression. Roman anxiety about fratricide was pervasive, manifesting (for example) in the story of Romulus and Remus and in accounts of the civil wars of the late Republic.² But beyond fratricide's moral and political dimension, the idea of ritual pollution deserves to be taken seriously. Kin murder of all types was thought to bring a particularly strong form of ritual pollution upon the murderer.³ Fratricide in particular violated the relationship between brothers, which was supposed to be guided by *pietas*; Cicero notes that brothers are linked by caring for family graves and worshipping in family cults, implying a cultic component to the fraternal relationship.⁴ Given their place in a longer narrative of cultic deficiencies on Nero's part, and a parallel narrative of expressions of divine anger throughout the extant Neronian hexad, Nero's murders of his brother and mother begin a pattern of transgression that powerfully illustrates the depths which Roman cultic memory has reached. When even a *princeps'* closest kin are not safe despite the threat of ritual pollution, how close can society stay to its religious norms?

Nero is described as already "unsettled" (*Ann.* 13.15.1 *turbatus*) by threatening talk from Agrippina when she reminds him that Britannicus is Claudius' true heir (13.14.2 *veram . . . stirpem*), but the event that finally pushes Nero to the decision to murder Britannicus occurs at a religious festival, the Saturnalia (13.15.2 *festis Saturno diebus*). During his turn as "king" in a festive game, Nero orders Britannicus to sing before the assembled company, hoping to make him a laughing stock, but what happens is rather different. Britannicus' song, "in which it was conveyed that he had been thrust out of his father's seat and the affairs of state" (13.15.2 *quo evolutum eum sede patria rebusque summis significabatur*), produces different reactions: "At this there arose a more obvious pity, because night and the playful atmosphere had removed dissimulation. Understanding the malice, Nero "intensified his hatred" (*unde*

¹ Galtier 1999, 67: "Il en suggère le côté monstrueux;" see also 71–2.

² See Jal 1963, 407–10; Woodman and Martin 1996, 123; Bannon 1997, 187; Lennon 2014, 129–31.

³ Lennon 2014, 94; most of his examples involve the murder of a parent.

⁴ Cic. *Off.* 1.54–5. See Bannon 1997, 9–10, 27, 86–7 (on Petron. 80.3–4) on fraternal *pietas*.

orta miseratio manifestior, quia dissimulationem nox et lascivia exemerat. Nero intellecta invidia odium intendit) and, at Agrippina's urging, began plans to poison Britannicus (13.15.3). The onlookers' pity, evidently not the reaction Nero had envisioned, recalls popular feelings of sympathy for Britannicus at moments when Claudius made obvious his preference for Nero (12.26.2 *miser cordiae*; 12.41.2 *miserabantur*).⁵ Not only do these onlookers, like those of *Annals* 12, fail to act on their sympathies and assist Britannicus, but now their pity, visible to Nero, is actually what prompts him to make the preparations necessary to kill Britannicus.⁶ Unlike Suetonius, Tacitus sets this interaction during the Saturnalia, a religious festival of great importance for the *domus*, which was above all celebrated by families and within households.⁷ Tacitus perhaps wants the reader to suspect that Saturn would not be pleased by such a violation of fraternal *pietas* at his feast. The Saturnalia also famously allowed the temporary reversal of normal power dynamics, with masters waiting table at dinner and slaves being given the opportunity to express their opinions freely.⁸ In retaliating against Britannicus *after* the Saturnalia was over, i.e. after "normal" life had been resumed outside the boundaries of the festival, Nero is allowing events that occurred during his role as *Saturnalicus princeps*, the "king" of a drinking game, to affect his actions as the real *princeps*.⁹ Extending Saturnalian chaos into normal life in this way marks Nero out as a bad ruler, the type of *princeps* who "represents the anomic and threatening aspects of the *Saturnia regna*... [whose] arbitrariness results in... chaos and injustice."¹⁰ This irreligious act of fratricide, originating in a celebration in honor of a god, gives a foretaste of the extent of Nero's violations. Furthermore, the murder occurs "among the sanctities of the table" (13.17.2 *inter sacra mensae*), a serious religious violation in itself. The phrase *sacra mensae* signifies the norms of hospitality and the guest-host relationship that were guaranteed by the gods; it particularly refers to the reconciliation and harmony of family members that was supposed to take

⁵ See §6.5, p. 266.

⁶ See Bartsch 1994, 14.

⁷ See Suet. *Ner.* 33.2–3 and Champlin 2003, 310 n. 14. See Versnel 1993, 147–50 on celebrations in private houses. Although the Saturnalia is better known for the participation of slaves, Dolansky 2011, 492–4 asserts that freeborn women and children would also have participated.

⁸ Versnel 1993, 149; Dolansky 2011, 492. For examples of slaves criticizing their masters, see Hor. *Sat.* 2.7.

⁹ Similarly, Somville 1988, 342; Champlin 2003, 151. On the *Saturnalicus princeps*, see Versnel 1993, 206–7; Dolansky 2011, 495. The poisoning of Britannicus takes place at a feast (*Ann.* 13.16.1 *epulante*) long enough after the Saturnalia for Nero to make arrangements for the procurement of the poison (13.15.3) and make a failed attempt at administering it (13.15.4–5). Given that the Saturnalia was several (probably 5–7) days long during this period (Dolansky 2011, 502 n. 5), it is not impossible that this feast was also part of the festival; if so, this is an even more direct instance of impiety.

¹⁰ Versnel 1993, 209.

place at table.¹¹ Nero is violating this principle in the worst possible way, and his horrid act recalls something out of the house of Atreus.¹²

The circumstances of Britannicus' burial prompt some to think of the potential supernatural consequences of the murder:

in campo tamen Martis sepultus est, adeo turbidis imbris ut vulgus iram deum portendi crediderit adversus facinus cui plerique etiam hominum ignoscebant, antiquas fratrum discordias et insociabile regnum aestimantes. (*Ann.* 13.17.1)

(Nevertheless, he was buried in the Field of Mars, to such turbulent storms that the crowd believed they portended the wrath of the gods against a crime that even many humans were pardoning, as they considered the ancient discords between brothers and the fact that kingship cannot be held in partnership.)

It is natural for Romans to consider these storms portentous, since violent storms had long been interpreted as such and included in prodigy lists.¹³ Much like the citizens who laughed at Claudius' disingenuous expiation of *incestum* (12.8.1), these people display a certain amount of religious acumen: there are still people at Rome with a firm enough grasp of cultic memory that they are aware of what storms have traditionally meant to a Roman people on the lookout for signs that their relationship with the gods is under strain. But just as with Claudius' detractors, this makes no practical difference: the *vulgus* does not express its misgivings even jokingly. Although storm prodigies appear to have been a particular area of expertise for the haruspices,¹⁴ and although Claudius recently revived that college, the Senate does not summon these experts for a consultation. We can compare this with the flood of the Tiber in AD 15 that prompted one senator to suggest the consultation of the Sibylline books, only to be refused by Tiberius (1.76.1).¹⁵ Setting these two episodes side by side, it becomes clear that the Roman Senate has lost its inclination to invoke the interpretation-expiation procedure traditionally applied to prodigious or potentially prodigious events in Rome. The impulse to see divine anger is retained only among the *vulgus*, which is not part of the institutional framework for recognizing and correcting ruptures in the *pax deorum* in the way that the Senate and priests are. This shows the insidious creep of cultic amnesia: ever since Tiberius, the Roman people have been confronted with emperors who are not invested in preserving the traditional ritual apparatus. After so many decades of seeing this de-emphasized by their leaders, people are unsurprisingly not interested in, or sufficiently aware of, the traditional procedures for dealing with potentially prodigious occurrences

¹¹ See Lennon 2015, 723–4, 731 and evidence there cited.

¹² Cf. Sen. *Thy.* 981 *iucunda mensae sacra iuvenilis*, “the pleasant sanctities of the young men’s table,” with Lennon 2015, 727–8. For similarities between Tacitus’ *domus Augusta* and the house of Atreus, see Santoro L’Hoir 2006, *passim* (esp. e.g. 33–44).

¹³ See Krauss 1930, 48–9; MacBain 1982, 92, 95 for examples.

¹⁴ MacBain 1982, 199.

¹⁵ On the passage, see §1.1.

like storms. Furthermore, not everyone seems to agree that there is a problem. Tacitus tells us in his own voice that many humans, unlike the gods (*hominum* here contrasts strongly with *deum*), are not perturbed;¹⁶ some of Nero's subjects, if not all of them, are more willing to make allowances for the circumstances leading to Britannicus' murder than they think the gods will be. The popular explanation for Nero's actions (brothers' inability to share power) recalls Romulus and Remus' struggle for the kingship,¹⁷ and this ancient tendency toward sibling rivalry is used by some to explain away the severe problem that the murder constitutes. It is certainly possible to think that the gods will punish Nero for the murder while simultaneously understanding the purely human reasons he committed it. But while Roman cultural memory can provide a perfectly reasonable (if not altogether positive) paradigm for the idea that dominion cannot be shared between brothers, cultic memory roundly condemns it. If ritual concerns are taken into account, the Romans' acceptance of murder shows either their fickleness (in forgetting the pity they once had for Britannicus) or their blindness (to the violation of fraternal *pietas*).

The rain at Britannicus' funeral is not the only meteorological phenomenon showing the gods' disapproval of Nero's impious actions. At the end of AD 55, the year in which Nero kills Britannicus and resolves to kill his own mother (*Ann.* 13.20.1), Tacitus reports another prodigious occurrence: "The *princeps* purified the city in accordance with a response from the haruspices, because the temple of Jupiter and Minerva had been struck by lightning" (13.24.2 *urbem princeps lustravit ex responso haruspicum, quod Iovis ac Minervae aedes de caelo tactae erant*). Davies suggests the incident is included merely because it was "unavoidably well known" and hence "difficult to ignore,"¹⁸ but the way Tacitus highlights the lightning strike indicates it has deeper significance. The vocabulary is unusual: Tacitus uses *tangere* only twice, both times in the phrase *tactus de caelo* referring to buildings struck by lightning.¹⁹ Tacitus' placement of the report is also striking. He emphasizes that he is reporting this lightning strike at the end of a narrative year (13.24.1 *fine anni*), something unusual for Tacitus.²⁰ Since Britannicus' murder took place sometime between 17 December (the beginning of the Saturnalia) and 1 January AD 56, his death was one of the final events of the *actual* year AD 55, but not of Tacitus' *textual* year.²¹ After thus drawing our attention to the lightning strike, Tacitus makes sure to note that Nero actually responds to the prodigy in a traditional way:

¹⁶ The indicative *ignoscebant* indicates that this is not the interpretation of the *vulgus*, but of Tacitus himself.

¹⁷ Cf. Morgan 1993, 329; Bannon 1997; Davies 2004, 212 n. 207. D. S. Levene has pointed out to me that *antiquas* suggests that we are to think specifically of Romulus and Remus.

¹⁸ Davies 2004, 162.

¹⁹ Syme 1958, 726. The other passage is 14.12.2, on which see §7.3, pp. 302–4.

²⁰ Luce 1977, 83–4; Ginsburg 1981, 33.

²¹ I owe this point to D. S. Levene.

he consults the haruspices, traditionally considered experts in the interpretation of lightning strikes,²² and personally performs an expiation (*princeps lustravit*) upon their advice. This means that the first and only time that an expiation is performed in the extant text of the *Annals*, it is Rome's most impious *princeps* who is in charge; somehow, Nero is wise enough to consult the haruspices even if his Senate was not. This is a striking indication that Claudius' revival of the college, although he himself did not make use of it, actually has had some small effect on the conduct of cult in Rome and given these traditional religious experts a return to prominence. The location of the prodigy shows a continuity of divine anger from one principate to the next: lightning has now succeeded the unlucky birds (12.43.1) and swarm of bees (12.64.1) that also visited the Capitoline under Claudius. It might be tempting for Nero's contemporaries to think that he is finally taking the appropriate ritual action to end the string of prodigies at the state cult's ritual center; but Tacitus' reader, with the benefit of hindsight, will know that this does not make Nero a conscientious religious actor in all respects. Furthermore, just because Nero performs an expiation does not mean it will be successful. The historical record contains plenty of examples of expiatory ceremonies that the gods apparently did not deem sufficient to placate their anger, since they followed closely, or even interrupted, those expiations with further signs indicating their continued displeasure.²³ As we shall see, signs of divine anger will continue to appear to Nero throughout his reign, suggesting that his transgressions are too great to guarantee any long-term benefit for his diligent use of cultic tradition in this instance.

Another prodigy at the end of book 13 leaves even less doubt that Britannicus' murder has upset the gods:

Eodem anno Ruminalem arborem in comitio, quae octingentos et triginta ante annos Remi Romulique infantiam texerat, mortuis ramalibus et arescente trunco deminutam prodigii loco habitum est, donec in novos fetus revivisceret.

(*Ann.* 13.58)

(In the same year, it was considered like a prodigy that the Ruminal Tree in the Comitium, which 830 years earlier had protected Remus and Romulus as infants, was diminished in size, its branches dead and its trunk drying out—until it came to life again to new growth.)

The *ficus Ruminalis* whose life is now threatened embodies Roman cultural memory in that it is a literally living link with Rome's most distant past, dating from the very genesis of the city. Although, as Hunt has recently

²² Krauss 1930, 36; MacBain 1982, 50–3, 126; Santangelo 2013, 98–9.

²³ Unsuccessful expiation followed by further prodigies: Livy 22.1.15–20 and 22.10.2–6 (217 BC), with Levene 1993, 43; Livy 31.12.1–5, with Levene 1993, 79–80; Livy 42.20, with Levene 1993, 109. Expiation interrupted by prodigies: Livy 27.37.7–8 (207 BC), with Santangelo 2013, 166–8.

demonstrated, Pliny the Elder's description of it (*HN* 15.77) expresses some doubts about whether this tree in the *comitium* was actually over 800 years old and was actually the site where the she-wolf suckled Romulus and Remus, Tacitus tells the story straight, "ascrib[ing] to the comitium fig the role of the 'original' tree, without any of Pliny's dry reserve."²⁴ Its withering therefore constitutes a serious loss to cultic memory; nevertheless, Tacitus is critical of the way Neronian Romans respond. His phrasing suggests popular interpretation of the portent is incorrect: the phrase *ominis loco* implies that the people interpreting an omen are "at best . . . right, but for the wrong reasons."²⁵ Where they err is in ceasing to worry: worse is still to come from Nero at the beginning of *Annals* 14, showing that the public is unwise to assume that all will be well as soon as the tree begins to grow again.²⁶ Tacitus' language recalls Nero's past crimes and anticipates his future ones. He emphasizes the tree's antiquity by giving its exact age and draws attention to Romulus and Remus by inverting the usual order of their names.²⁷ Highlighting the ancient fraternal conflict that attended Rome's founding implicitly reminds the reader of Nero's killing of his own rival and brother Britannicus; if the positive connection to Rome's past represented by the living tree is threatened, the negative side of this particular component of Roman cultural memory (the fratricide bound up in the city's foundation) is unfortunately alive and well. Here, the neglect of cultic memory intersects destructively with a non-cultic aspect of Roman cultural memory: the worst features of the Romulus and Remus paradigm are being replayed in the present, while the prodigious withering of the tree that providentially protected them and made Rome's foundation possible is not being taken seriously and expiated according to age-old ritual paradigms. And as Dickison and Plympton show, Tacitus' unusual language in describing the tree's death and rebirth emphasizes the intermingling themes of "birth, nurturing and death" in a way that looks forward to Agrippina's murder, where similar themes are emphasized.²⁸ Placement is significant, too: this chapter marks the end not only of a book, but also of AD 58. This is the only place in the second half of the *Annals* where year-end and book-end coincide, emphasizing that the *quinquennium*, the relatively mild first five years of Nero's reign, are at an end.²⁹ The *figus* prodigy also comes immediately after a disastrous fire among the Ubii (13.57.3), reinforcing the sense of

²⁴ Hunt 2016, 111; her excellent analysis of the passage (at 103–12) is worth reading in full. Pliny explicitly states that the tree is replanted by priests when it dies (*HN* 15.77, with Hunt 2016, 112, 119).

²⁵ Ash 2007a, 77, on the nearly identical wording of *Hist.* 2.91.1.

²⁶ Cf. McCulloch 1980, 241; Hunt 2016, 216.

²⁷ The phrasing is paralleled in archaic Latin: for examples, see Koestermann 1967, 349.

²⁸ Dickison and Plympton 1977, 185. See also Galtier 1999, 74.

²⁹ Koestermann 1967, 349; McCulloch 1980, 237.

impending doom.³⁰ Britannicus' murder may have been Nero's first transgression, but as Tacitus' gods express their disapproval through the weakening of a living link with the past, they indicate that worse is yet to come.

7.3 KIN MURDER AND DIVINE WRATH II: AGRIPPINA

Britannicus' death in *Annals* 13 forms a logical precursor to Nero's "long-considered crime" (*Ann.* 14.1.1 *diu meditatatum scelus*) of matricide, a serious religious transgression that visited so great a ritual impurity upon the perpetrator that, as Cicero suggests, it can never be removed by expiation or purification rituals.³¹ But Tacitus complicates the ritual dimensions of Agrippina's murder by portraying her as a religious transgressor in her own right. As we have seen, her transgressive activities began in Claudius' reign as she sought divine honors for herself, such as the *carpentum* (12.42.2), and continued after his death as she allowed her dead husband's deification to influence the way she herself was treated.³² As Nero's reign progresses, alongside the narrative of Nero's transgressions against Britannicus, we are also told of Agrippina's attempts to insinuate herself into the running of the state in ways that impact cult. Although Nero promises a separation between Imperial house and the state (13.4.2 *discretam domum et rem publicam*), she evidently has other ideas. In continually calling the Senate to the Palatine and in trying to mount the emperor's dais (13.5.1–2), Agrippina attempts to usurp parts of Nero's role as *princeps*. Tacitus describes her attendance at Senate meetings that probably took place in the library attached to Apollo's temple on the Palatine:³³ "The Fathers were called to the Palatine for this: so that she could stand in attendance at doors that were added at the back, separated by a curtain to keep from them the sight of her, but not take away her ability to hear them" (13.5.1 *Patres . . . in Palatium ob id vocabantur, ut adstaret additis a tergo foribus velo discreta, quod visum arceret, auditus non adimeret*). Tacitus' wording recalls his description of the dubious behavior of the German

³⁰ Interpreted with the Stoic idea of purifying *ekpyrosis*, the fire may indicate that the Julio-Claudian dynasty is about to be purged away (Santoro L'Hoir 2006). For fires viewed as signs of divine anger, see Krauss 1930, 91–2 (listing examples in the city of Rome).

³¹ Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 66, with Lennon 2014, 95. Matricide was considered *parricidium* (Just. *Dig.* 48.9, Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.34ff.; for Nero's killing of Agrippina specifically, see Suet. *Ner.* 34.5, Juv. 8.212–14), an offense allegedly punishable by being put in a sack and thrown into the sea to contain the parricide's ritual pollution (Lassen 1992, 150; Lennon 2014, 95–6; see also Suet. *Aug.* 33.1, with Wardle 2014, 268–9 and evidence there cited; Dyck 2010, 1–2).

³² See §6.5, p. 268.

³³ The Senate met here frequently: Tamm 1963, 57 n. 80; Richardson 1992, 14. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 2.37.3.

prophetess Veleda from the *Histories*: “It was prohibited to approach Veleda face to face or to speak with her: she was kept from sight so that there would be more veneration attached to her” (*Hist.* 4.65.4 *coram adire adloquique Vele-dam negatum: arcebantur aspectu quo venerationis plus inesset*). Tacitus took a decidedly negative view of Veleda’s attempts to acquire political power by making herself seem divine;³⁴ the reader is probably meant to have a similar reaction to Agrippina elevating herself in a venerated Roman temple. The addition of a back door to the temple is a needless alteration of the fabric of a religious building, made simply to suit the emperor’s mother.³⁵ Appropriating the trappings of the Vestal Virgins and taking on the *flamonium* of Claudius was not enough; now Agrippina, skulking in the back of Apollo’s temple, inside a space marked off for the god, attempts to make herself appear numinous and distant, an object of veneration. A woman, an intrinsically domestic member of the Imperial house, is not only becoming directly involved in the political life of the state, but is doing so in a cultic context.

Nero does attempt to stop her, but his resistance is not portrayed in a positive light. Tacitus describes Agrippina’s attempts to preside on the dais alongside Nero as he receives legates from Armenia. We have seen this before: she also appeared for veneration on her own dais (12.37.4 *suggestu*) alongside Claudius, presiding outrageously over the *signa*.³⁶ Nero, unlike Claudius, is successful in keeping her away: “She was preparing to ascend the commander’s dais and preside alongside, and would have done so if Seneca (everyone else was fixed to the spot with fear) had not advised him to run to meet his mother as she came. So by a show of piety, the path for disgrace was blocked” (13.5.2 *escendere suggestum imperatoris et praesidere simul parabat, nisi ceteris pavore defixis Seneca admonuisset venienti matri occurreret. ita specie pietatis obviam itum dedecori*). *Pietas* refers to Nero’s (apparent) fulfillment of his filial duty, but the word maintains religious overtones.³⁷ *Species pietatis* emphasizes the hypocrisy inherent in the politics of the Imperial court.³⁸ Agrippina is wrong to elevate herself, but Nero, who can only pretend to show filial *pietas*, is equally reprehensible.

³⁴ Those who believe Veleda is a goddess are described as victims of *superstitio* (*Hist.* 4.61.2).

³⁵ The position of the new doors makes the building more like a theater than a temple (Santoro L’Hoir 2006, 240).

³⁶ See §6.5, p. 267.

³⁷ Saller 1988, 404: *pietas* toward parents originally derived from worship of *dii parentes*, but there is “no evidence from the classical period that paternal authority was buttressed by supernatural beliefs or religious rituals.” The continued emphasis on sons carrying out proper funeral rites for their fathers (cf. Just. *Dig.* 11.7) may indicate a continued cultic component to the relationship.

³⁸ Walker 1952, 241. Deceptive display is also important in Bartsch 1994’s notion of Imperial theatricality in the Neronian *Annals*. On the generally negative meaning of *specie* + genitive in the *Annals*, see §4.5, pp. 199–200, and references cited in Ch. 4 n. 98.

Agrippina's transgressiveness becomes more explicit as the narrative progresses. When Nero removes the freedman Pallas from control over the Imperial accounts (*Ann.* 13.14.1), she retaliates with veiled threats implying that Britannicus would be as fit to rule as Nero: "She was not opposed to the revelation of all the evils of that unhappy house, particularly her own marriage and her own use of poison: it was thanks only to the foresight of the gods and of herself that her stepson was still alive" (13.14.3 *non abnuere se, quin cuncta infelicis domus mala patefierent, suae in primis nuptiae, suum veneficium: id solum diis et sibi provisum, quod viveret privignus*). Agrippina is thoroughly unashamed of her own most culturally problematic deeds: her incestuous marriage with its potential to call down divine vengeance upon the state (cf. 12.5.1) and her murder of her own husband. In preserving Britannicus' life, presumably so that she would be able to hold over Nero's head the possible threat he represents,³⁹ she equates her foresight to that of the gods; Agrippina assimilates herself to the divine, attributing to herself a supernatural ability to determine the course of events. Ritual language follows: "At the same time she stretched out her hands and called upon the consecrated Claudius, upon the infernal shades of the Silani, and upon her many crimes that had done no good" (13.14.3 *simul intendere manus, consecratum Claudium, inferno<s> Silanorum manes invocare et tot inrita facinora*). *Intendere manus* and *invocare* describe gestures and speech characteristic of prayer.⁴⁰ But Agrippina is praying to people she has personally killed: she murdered Claudius and saw him deified for her own advancement, she killed one of the Silani in order to eliminate challengers to Nero's new rule (13.1.1), and the other was likewise a casualty of her and Nero's advancement (12.3.2–4.1). She is responsible, in other words, for the suitability for invocation of the people she now calls upon, almost like a witch or necromancer, practitioners of magic who were sometimes said to murder or sacrifice people in order to have a ghost to consult.⁴¹ Agrippina's claim of divine foresight is linked with her nefarious crimes, and this establishes her as a double transgressor: she couples evil deeds with a hubristic hunger for power. Claudius' incestuous marriage has proved far more dangerous to Rome's relationship with the gods than Silanus' alleged incest ever was.

Tacitus' narrative is therefore one of parallel or competing transgression. Both Nero and Agrippina are impious, disingenuous, or self-aggrandizing in their approach to cult; her death is framed as the killing of one transgressor by another. The combination of Britannicus' murder (showing that Nero is capable of such a crime) and Agrippina' impious behavior (which suggests she will encounter some sort of punishment) prepares us for her death; as bad

³⁹ Koestermann 1967, 260.

⁴⁰ *Invocare* is the technical term for calling upon gods or the shades of the dead (*OLD* s.v. 1b; Appel 1909, 68). On *intendere manus*, see Ch. 1 n. 37.

⁴¹ See Ogden 2001, 175, 200–1; cf. Lucan 6.529–32.

as Nero's crime is, the impious Agrippina gets her just deserts. We also receive an early indication that fate plays a role in Nero's string of murders of his family members. Tacitus recounts how Nero's pursuit of the freedwoman Acte begins to break down Agrippina's authority over him (*Ann.* 13.12.1) and states that Nero pulls away from his wife Octavia in favor of Acte "due to some fate, or because the forbidden has more influence" (13.12.2 *fato quodam, an quia praevalent inlicita*). The reader gets two explanations for Nero's actions;⁴² by allowing the possibility of a supernatural explanation for Nero's distancing himself from Octavia, and his association with Acte and concomitant separation from his mother, Tacitus insinuates that fate may have had a role in engineering the downfall not only of Agrippina, a transgressor in her own right who deserves punishment, but also the innocent Octavia, whom Nero will eventually murder. Why exactly this toxic combination of dysfunctional family relationships and impious kin-murder might be fated is a question to which Tacitus provides no obvious answer. Perhaps we are meant to see the seeds of Nero's transgressions in the lapses of an earlier generation: among other things, in the continued decline in cultic memory that has plagued Rome since the beginning of the *Annals*.

Both Tacitus' readers and his characters have sufficient indication that things will get worse before they get better. The ominous warfare, fires, and death of the *ficus Ruminalis* at the end of *Annals* 13 might have alerted Nero's subjects that something worse was coming, yet all these warnings are ignored. For the reader, Tacitus' commentary plays the same role that prodigies play for his characters and makes it clear that Agrippina's murder is a part of the chain that has been planned for some time. At the opening of *Annals* 14, Tacitus describes it as a "long-meditated crime" which "Nero did not put off any longer... Everyone wanted the mother's power to be crushed, and no one believed that the son's hatred would continue all the way to the point of her murder" (*Ann.* 14.1.1, 3 *diu meditatatum scelus non ultra Nero distulit... cupientibus cunctis infringi potentiam matris et credente nullo usque ad caedem eius duratura fillii odia*). Yet Tacitus has already told us how Nero, "hungry for killing his mother" (13.20.3 *interficiendae matris avidus*), would already have committed the deed had Burrus not dissuaded him. Agrippina's outrageous transgressions and an underestimation of Nero's impiousness, but also perhaps an unwillingness to recognize the temporary withering of the *ficus Ruminalis* as a sign, allow the murder to proceed unchecked.

Both the murder itself and the collapsible boat method Anicetus suggests are religiously problematic:⁴³

⁴² Whitehead 1979, 492 sees Tacitus' second explanation as the only acceptable one, but this seems too hasty a dismissal of *fato quodam*.

⁴³ Neither Dio nor Suetonius attributes the boat stratagem to Anicetus (Devillers 1995, 330), who will also be involved in Octavia's murder (*Ann.* 14.62.2).

nihil tam capax fortuitorum quam mare; et si naufragio intercepta sit, quem adeo iniquum ut sceleri adsignet quod venti et fluctus deliquerint? additurum principem defunctae templum et aras et cetera ostentandae pietati. (*Ann.* 14.3.3)

(Nothing was as capable of fortuitous occurrences as the sea; and if her life were cut short by shipwreck, who would be so unfair as to ascribe to crime an offense that had been committed by the winds and the waves? The *princeps* would add a temple and altars for the deceased, and other methods of showing off his piety.)

Anicetus' plan is carefully calculated to appeal to Nero's sense of false *pietas*,⁴⁴ which, as we have seen, he only uses as a cover for his designs against his mother. Indeed, Nero is the *only* emperor in the Julio-Claudian line to whom Tacitus ever applies the term *pietas*,⁴⁵ and in both instances it is a false *pietas*. But in Anicetus' words, the cultic sense of *pietas* is felt even more strongly than before, since the *species* in question will consist of a temple. Anicetus' suggestion, and the fact that Nero readily accepts it (14.4.1), show the problems which can arise from the acceptance of cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family. Using religious ritual to honor *principes* and their relatives has now become so accepted that such cultic commemoration can be plausibly suggested as a means of misdirecting public attention away from a serious crime. Because the public now equates the building of temples and altars with *pietas*, those actions can be used to conceal matricide, a crime of serious ritual pollution that will certainly anger the gods. Anicetus' plan thus shows strikingly how Imperial cult can encourage dangerous violations of Roman cultic norms.

Yet the gods are not passive observers of Nero's crimes; their response to his execution of Anicetus' plan indicates that the gods, who have continued to send prodigies indicating their displeasure, are equally capable of punishing this transgressive emperor. They actively thwart Nero's attempts to cover up his mother's murder: although he hopes that night will hide his deed (*Ann.* 14.4.3), "the gods provided a night gleaming with stars and quiet with a peaceful sea, as if to expose the crime" (14.5.1 *noctem sideribus inlustrem et placido mari quietam quasi convincendum ad scelus dii praebuere*). With clear weather, the gods not only prevent Nero from covering his crime in darkness, but also neutralize Anicetus' proposal to blame her death on a fortuitous shipwreck; ships do not go down when sailing upon calm seas.⁴⁶ Anicetus' reliance on maritime *fortuita* as a cover also proves unfounded: *fors* actually saves Agrippina and her maid Acerronia from being crushed to death by the boat's superstructure, from which they are "by chance" (*forte*) protected by the walls of their litter (14.5.1), and is partly responsible for Acerronia's death when she, claiming to be Agrippina, is stabbed with whatever weapons happen to be to hand (14.5.3 *contis et remis et quae fors obtulerat navalibus telis*

⁴⁴ Koestermann 1968, 29.

⁴⁵ Syme 1958, 415.

⁴⁶ Muller 1994, 36.

conficitur). Anicetus and Nero have failed to understand that chance cannot be relied upon to behave predictably; and the gods, in lessening the opportunity for *fors* to carry off Agrippina, thwart Nero's plan to blame chance for his matricide. Nero's plan to use religious honors to hide crime, and his apparent ignorance of the workings of the supernatural, appear to meet with divine disapproval.

The deceptive message (*Ann.* 14.6.1 *fallacibus litteris*) Agrippina sends to Nero after the attempt on her life, however, introduces ambiguity into the reader's attempt to identify the gods' view of what has happened: "She sent her freedman Agermus to tell her son that, thanks to the kindness of the gods and his own good fortune, she had escaped a serious accident" (14.6.2 *misitque libertum Agermum, qui nuntiaret filio benignitate deum et fortuna eius evasisse gravem casum*). To anyone unaware that Nero himself is responsible for this attempt on Agrippina's life (that is, for anyone in contemporary Rome who has believed Anicetus' cover story), this letter looks like flattery. *Fortuna eius* evokes the *fortuna populi Romani* thought to protect the state, and by using the expression, Agrippina flatters Nero through the implication that anything that benefits him benefits Rome as a whole by extension. Similarly, *benignitas deum*, which usually describes circumstances relating to the good of the entire state,⁴⁷ implies that Agrippina's survival was a divine "kindness" both to Nero and to Rome. The flattering tone continues in the next sentence, when Agrippina begs, or prays (14.6.2 *orare*), for her son to avoid visiting her immediately. Tacitus' reader knows that this message is disingenuous; he introduces Agrippina's words with the observation that "she understood that the only remedy for the trap was not to understand it" (14.6.1 *solum insidiarum remedium esse <sensit>, si non intellegerentur*). It is not clear, however, whether Nero is aware that she, despite the tone of her message, actually understands that this "accident" was part of a deliberate plot. He readily accepted Anicetus' plan to blame the entire attack on *fors*; could he interpret Agrippina's reference to *fortuna* as a sign that she, at least, has seen through his plan? Furthermore, there is a (perhaps unintentional) element of truth in Agrippina's words: in the event, *fors* and the gods worked in unexpected ways, and Agrippina was saved. Perhaps this is not mere rhetoric, and the gods *have* briefly shown kindness to her, although the fires near Cologne (13.57.3)⁴⁸ and the death of the *ficus* (13.57–8) have hinted that her days are numbered. This recalls how the phrase *benignitas deum* was used in the Claudian books, when Claudius invokes it to describe the state of affairs when he revives the

⁴⁷ For other instances of the phrase, see Syme 1958, 707. *Benignitas* is nearly always attributed to the gods or to fortune (cf. Ash 2007a, 159): cf. *Hist.* 4.85; *Ann.* 11.15, 12.43, 13.41.4. It is only used once of a person (*Hist.* 2.30.2 of Caecina). See also §6.5, pp. 270–1.

⁴⁸ Tacitus does not here specify that the site is Agrippina's birthplace (cf. *Ann.* 12.27.1). See Koestermann 1967, 347; McCulloch 1980, 237–8.

haruspices (11.15.2), or when it described Rome's narrow escape from famine (12.43.2): in neither case was it entirely clear whether asserting the gods' kindness was incredibly naive, or actually somewhat justified given the positive things (a lack of war; an ultimate avoidance of famine) that persisted despite negative events (Messalina's activities; dire prodigies). In this instance, too, although it is ludicrous to speak of the gods' kindness toward a Rome where the *princeps*' mother has committed so many religious transgressions and where the *princeps* himself is guilty of impious fratricide and now attempted matricide, it actually is thanks to the gods and to *fors* that she survived. So even in Rome's darkest moments, it is not entirely straightforward to understand what the gods are driving at. This is particularly true of Agrippina's demise. As a religious transgressor in her own right, she deserves her death; it seems paradoxical of the gods to preserve her in the shipwreck attempt, but that merely shows how they disapprove of Nero's irreligious matricide.

This tension continues in Tacitus' account of her death, when we learn that Agrippina had foreknowledge of her murder thanks to astrology:

hunc sui finem multos ante annos crediderat Agrippina contempseratque. nam consulenti super Nerone responderunt Chaldaei fore ut imperaret matremque occideret; atque illa "occidat" inquit, "dum imperet". (*Ann.* 14.9.3)

(Many years earlier Agrippina had accepted that this would be her end, but had treated it as of no importance. For when she was making a consultation about Nero, the Chaldaeans had responded that it would come to pass that he would rule, and would kill his mother. She said, "Let him kill me, as long as he rules.")

This is the final piece of information the reader receives about Agrippina's consultations of astrologers about Nero,⁴⁹ and we now learn that her own fate was part of the prediction; she has known all along that Nero would commit matricide. She has this knowledge not because of the *ficus* prodigy and all the other prodigies of Claudius' reign that pointed to Nero's disastrous ascension (for Tacitus never gives any indication of Agrippina's responses to these events), but because she has pre-empted traditional prodigies to seek knowledge of the future outside the bounds of traditional Roman religion by consulting astrologers. Furthermore, she shrugs off the astrologers' prediction of her own fate, concerned only with the influence that Nero will have as emperor. In her thirst for power, therefore, Agrippina ignores several warnings that Nero would commit an impious act that could draw down the anger of the gods upon Rome. Whereas most characters in the *Annals* ignore divine warnings out of incompetence, Agrippina does so out of wilful disregard; where most have led Rome into religious error through their ignorance of

⁴⁹ See §5.5, p. 225.

cultic memory that dictates the proper conduct of ritual, Agrippina allows Rome's leader to commit matricide at immense cost not only to herself, but also to the emperor's, and therefore the entire community's, ritual purity.

Nevertheless, several details of Tacitus' story suggest we are to pity her: the reaction of nearby people to news that she was in danger (*Ann.* 14.8.1), her poignant cries as her maid flees (14.8.4) and as the assassins move in (14.8.5), and her hasty, cheap funeral and lack of a real burial, recalling Britannicus' pitiable funeral (14.9.1).⁵⁰ There are also suggestions that the gods disapprove of the murder, as Tacitus implies in his description of reactions to Agrippina's death:

Sed a Caesare perfecto demum scelere magnitudo eius intellecta est. reliquo noctis modo per silentium defixus, saepius pavore exurgens et mentis inops lucem opperiebatur tamquam exitium adlaturam . . . amici dehinc adire templa et coepto exemplo proxima Campaniae municipia victimis et legationibus laetitiam testari: ipse diversa simulatione maestus et quasi incolumitati suae infensus ac morti parentis inlacrimans. quia tamen non, ut hominum vultus, ita locorum facies mutantur, obversabaturque maris illius et litorum gravis aspectus (et erant qui crederent sonitum tubae collibus circum editis planctusque tumulo matris audiri), Neapolim concessit. (14.10.1–3)

(But only when the crime had been finished did Caesar understand its magnitude. For the rest of the night he was sometimes fixed to the spot in silence, but more often getting out of bed in fear, and, out of his senses, waited for daylight as if it were going to bring his destruction . . . Then his friends approached the temples, and, when they had begun the precedent, the towns of Campania bore witness to their happiness with sacrificial victims and delegations. He himself, with a different sort of pretense, appeared sad, as if he hated his own safety and wept for his mother's death. But nevertheless, since the face of places does not change as people's expressions do, and the oppressive sight of that sea and those shores passed before his eyes (and there were those who believed that the sound of a trumpet was heard in the high hills round about, and wailing at his mother's tomb), he withdrew to Naples.)

Nero's spectrum of reactions to his matricide can be fruitfully compared with Tiberius' expressions of a guilty conscience after the indictment of Messalinus (6.6), where his lament expressed an awareness that he was being punished by the gods (in the form of psychological torment) for his misdeeds, a situation which he did nothing to ameliorate.⁵¹ Nero's distress is in some ways similar: his sleepless night and dread of death with the coming of dawn, and his avoidance of the area where the murder was committed, coupled with the belated realization of his sin (*scelus*),⁵² suggest a consciousness of possible retribution for an impious act that is similar to what Tiberius expressed.

⁵⁰ Devillers 1995, 338–9. Cf. O'Gorman 1997, 9.

⁵¹ See §5.2, pp. 215–17.

⁵² For *scelus* as related to religious pollution, see Lennon 2014, 39–41.

But, just as for Tiberius, Nero's apparent remorse is limited and ultimately futile,⁵³ not least because of the ambiguity surrounding the reports of strange sounds around the murder site and Agrippina's tomb. Koestermann assumes they are figments of Nero's imagination and attributes them to his susceptibility to *superstitio*,⁵⁴ but Tacitus does not discount the possibility that these are real signs showing supernatural backlash for the matricide. Nevertheless, Nero himself does not necessarily see this. Compared with Suetonius' account (*Nero* 34.4), which makes it clear that Nero himself believes he is being persecuted by the Furies for his crime, Tacitus is more ambiguous.⁵⁵ He does not say that Nero heard any of these noises himself, only that people *believed* they could be heard, without necessarily affirming it; and these people believed the sounds *were* heard (passive *audiri*), not that Nero himself heard them.⁵⁶ This twofold distancing perhaps indicates that Nero is so ignorant of right and wrong, or at least so misled by the flattery of those around him (including adulatory dedications in the temples), that he does not believe he could face supernatural punishment for his crimes. Whereas Tiberius, then, recognized that the gods are punishing him, we cannot be sure whether Nero is aware of the consequences of matricide.

This leads to mutual misunderstandings for both emperor and subjects when Nero writes a letter to the Senate falsely accusing Agrippina of plotting against his life (*Ann.* 14.10.3) and listing her other crimes over the years. He mentions how he foiled her attempts to involve herself in state affairs (14.1.1), and continues:

temporum quoque Claudianorum obliqua insectatione cuncta eius dominationis flagitia in matrem transtulit, publica fortuna extinctam referens, namque et naufragium narrabat: quod fortuitum fuisse quis adeo hebes inveniretur ut crederet? aut a muliere naufraga missum cum telo unum qui cohortis et classis imperatoris perfringeret? ergo non iam Nero, cuius immanitas omnium questus antibat, sed Seneca adverso rumore erat quod oratione tali confessionem scripsisset. (14.11.2–3)

(Also obliquely criticizing the times of Claudius, he transferred all the outrages of that despotism to his mother, ascribing to public *fortuna* the fact that she had died. For he even talked about the shipwreck; but who could be found who was so stupid that he believed it had been fortuitous, or that a shipwrecked woman had sent one man with a weapon to demolish the cohorts and fleets of the emperor? Therefore not Nero, whose monstrousness exceeded everyone's complaints, but Seneca was the subject of hostile rumor, on the grounds that with such a speech he had written a confession.)

⁵³ See Fulkerson 2013, 157–8.

⁵⁴ Koestermann 1968, 44.

⁵⁵ Dio also makes explicit Nero's personal reaction to similar sounds (61.14.4).

⁵⁶ Cf. Champlin 2003, 91.

In claiming that *publica fortuna*, a supernatural force actively working to protect Rome,⁵⁷ is responsible for Agrippina's death, Nero contradicts Anicetus' original strategy of concealing the murder by blaming *fors*. But as Tacitus has told us, the supernatural actually worked, if not to save Agrippina, at least to prevent Nero's impious scheme. Instead of observing the signs of divine displeasure at his actions, or even of using Anicetus' cover-up strategy, Nero adopts Agrippina's own problematic rhetoric: his explanation of her death recalls her own disingenuous explanation for her survival of the shipwreck (14.6.2 *benignitate deum et fortuna eius*). In using *publica fortuna* to conceal something as sacrilegious as matricide, Nero masks his crime and its true motives. But he is not the only one who is blameworthy here: his subjects, Tacitus says, see through this facade and understand, despite his protestations, that it is Nero who is responsible, not divine providence (*fortuna*) or even chance (*fors*). But instead of expressing their displeasure at Nero, they turn their anger against Seneca. This is not unlike the laughter when Claudius ironically expiates the *incestum* of Silanus on the day of his incestuous wedding to Agrippina (12.8.1), where people are well aware that the emperor is doing something ritually problematic, but they do not intervene to stop it. Despite apparently universal understanding of Nero's monstrous crimes, nothing is done to halt a pattern of activities that threatens to draw down divine anger upon the whole community.

We also see in the aftermath of Agrippina's murder how the pattern of using cult acts to flatter the emperor leads to dangerous indifference to serious ritual crimes. In a passage already quoted, Nero's friends, and then the Campanians acting in an effort to please him, engage in cult activity in the form of sacrifices of thanksgiving for Nero's survival (*Ann.* 14.10.2).⁵⁸ This is what causes Nero to hide his symptoms of guilt and fear of punishment, even if his subsequent withdrawal to Naples suggests he still feels some qualms. That flattery will only intensify. The people compete (14.12.1 *miro . . . certamine*) to make *supplicationes* at the *pulvinaria* dotted across the city in sanctuaries,⁵⁹ institute games commemorating the revelation of Agrippina's alleged plot against Nero, erect a statue of Minerva next to Nero's portrait in the Curia, and make Agrippina's birthday a *dies nefastus*. All of these proposals seek to inscribe Agrippina's death into cultic memory, ensuring that she is enshrined in Rome's cult buildings and repeatedly commemorated in Rome's ritual calendar as a hostile force who was rightfully vanquished. Only Thrasea Paetus protests

⁵⁷ Cf. Koestermann 1968, 46. Fortuna Publica Populi Romani was worshipped at a temple on the Quirinal from the third century BC (cf. Vit. 3.2.2); see Richardson 1992, 158; Coarelli 1995; Matthews 2011, 61–2, 126–9.

⁵⁸ For the phrase *adire templa*, cf. *Ann.* 2.75.2 (on which see §3.2, p. 301), where it clearly indicates approaching the temple as a precursor to cult or ritual activity (sacrifice).

⁵⁹ For the worship of some gods at permanent *pulvinaria*, see Livy 42.30.8 and Hug 1959; Marcattili 2005.

these innovations: he leaves the Senate altogether, and, as Davies notes, “his stand is apparently endorsed by the gods, who (textually) immediately send a spate of prodigies” in the very next sentence.⁶⁰ This conduct has direct antecedents in the cultic commemorations of members of the Imperial family that have plagued Rome since the beginning of the *Annals*: rites to commemorate and celebrate the death of Agrippina are an even more egregious example of the same kind of impulse that led to similar commemorations of the death of Piso (3.18.2), the conviction of Gaius Silanus (4.15.3), and Titius Sabinus (4.70.3–4). Now, we see how this kind of flattery has the potential to lead a *princeps* away from knowledge of his crimes and to provoke the anger of the gods at the whole city. Only now, in Nero’s reign, does it become entirely clear that the abuses of ritual commemoration that we have seen throughout the *Annals* are a serious problem with direct consequences.

For even if the Senate and people accept Nero’s claim that *publica fortuna* killed Agrippina, the prodigies indicate that the gods think otherwise:

prodigia quoque crebra et inrita intercessere: anguem enixa mulier, et alia in concubitu mariti fulmine exanimata; iam sol repente obscuratus et tactae de caelo quattuordecim urbis regiones. quae adeo sine cura deum eveniebant ut multos post annos Nero imperium et scelera continuaverit. (*Ann.* 14.12.2)

(Frequent but ineffectual prodigies intervened: a woman gave birth to a snake, and another was killed by a thunderbolt during intercourse with her husband; now the sun was suddenly obscured, and all fourteen regions of the city were struck by lightning. These things happened without divine concern—to such an extent that Nero continued his command and his crimes for many years after this.)

Intercessere implies that the prodigies interrupted the events of 14.12.1, suggesting that Tacitus did not merely choose to describe these two things together, but that they actually coincided chronologically. They, like the prodigies in the Claudian books, are closely related to the events they seem designed to warn against. The two women have parallels in Agrippina’s destruction by the child she conceived and bore, confirming that the divine displeasure relates to her murder; the snake-birth in particular suggests Nero, given the rumors of snakes at his cradle (11.11.3). As an unexpectedly dangerous offspring, it also recalls the piglet with talons (12.64.1) and provides a link with the Claudian prodigies, suggesting again that these prodigies are part of a larger arc of divine displeasure that stretches back into the last principate. The suddenly arising storm reverses the clear weather the gods sent to preserve Agrippina in the shipwreck attempt (14.5.1); lightning strikes the city fourteen times, once in each of Rome’s official *regiones*, implying that the entire city of Rome will suffer for Nero’s matricide. These prodigies, however, do not

⁶⁰ Davies 2004, 199.

change Nero's behavior, as we learn from the final sentence of the passage, which can be interpreted in two ways. If *cura deum* refers to the gods' concern for mankind (a subjective genitive), the statement means that while they sent these signs, it was not because they care about human welfare; the sentiment recalls that of *Hist.* 1.3.2. But if *cura deum* refers to mankind's concern for the divine (objective genitive), the statement indicates that the prodigies are "ineffectual" because people refuse to heed them. Romans are too quick to flatter Nero, just as they were unwilling to place blame for Agrippina's murder where it was due, and so they not only accept his problematic religious rhetoric covering his own crime, but blatantly ignore the gods' signs that all is not right. As with the uncertainty about *benignitas deum* after Claudius' first set of prodigies (12.43.2), it remains unclear whether the gods are actually concerned with stopping Nero's evils, or indeed whether the *princeps* or his subjects could actually have changed the course of events. In any case, Nero's courtiers ignore the prodigies and fall into the old Tiberian pattern of religious flattery. Nero's partisans ("all the worst people," *deterrimus quisque*) convince him to return to Rome after Agrippina's death: "He should go without fear and experience his own veneration in person" (14.13.1 *iret intrepidus et venerationem sui coram experiretur*). *Veneratio* is the language of emperor cult (cf. 4.37.3); Nero's followers in effect promise he will be worshipped as a god for killing his mother. Again, the relationship between crime and cultic commemoration is emphasized; the reader is being shown a version of Rome that has completely lost its understanding of what is religiously problematic.

It is not merely Nero's friends who fall into this error, but the people as well. On his entry to Rome, he finds the entire city turned out to greet him, as well as "seats for spectacles constructed where he would enter, in the way that triumphs are viewed. Therefore a haughty victor over the public's slavery approached the Capitol and rendered thanks" (*Ann.* 14.13.2 *extructos, qua incederet, spectaculorum gradus, quo modo triumphi visuntur. hinc superbus ac publici servitii victor Capitolium adiit, grates exsolvit*). The description of Nero celebrating a triumph over the Roman people's servility is a pointed statement,⁶¹ but it is more than a cynical authorial observation. Tacitus specifically highlights the ritual component of the triumph, the sacrifice to Jupiter on the Capitoline at the end of the triumphal procession, which the impious Nero is unworthy to perform except in this twisted version.⁶² The restriction or inappropriate application of triumphal ritual was a serious problem of the Tiberian principate, and we now see that problem carried to its logical extreme; that element of continuity in the subversion of cultic memory suggests that Nero's impiety is likewise the logical conclusion of the problems that have plagued the principate since the beginning of the *Annals*. And the

⁶¹ Furneaux 1907, 248; Woodcock 1939, 101.

⁶² Walker 1952, 79. On the ritual elements of the triumph, see §1.6, pp. 56–7.

people have themselves contributed to this state of affairs: it is their preparations for his arrival that cause this staging of Nero's entry as a triumph (*hinc*), and their flattery is intimately connected with a subversion of ritual, allowing Nero not only to celebrate a faux triumph, but also to give thanks to the gods for a matricide he has committed.

In Nero's matricide, then, the reader begins to see the impious extreme toward which Tacitus' account of the principate has been leading. A society that since Tiberius' accession has used cult of the emperor and of his family members as a form of flattery has now become a society where impious murderers like Nero and Agrippina are venerated. A lack of concern with preserving cultic memory, particularly when it comes to the traditional methods of interpreting and responding to warnings and signs of displeasure from the gods, has borne fruit in a principate where prodigies are routinely ignored, and even expiation does not seem capable of reversing Rome's collision course with divine wrath. An Imperial family whose members have never been *au fait* with their own relationship to supernatural forces of causation like fate and *fortuna* has devolved into a free-for-all where ritually polluting kin-murder can be ascribed to providence's preservation of the public good. Even if the lapses in the maintenance of cultic memory that have happened under Tiberius and Claudius did not necessarily lead to disaster during their reigns, it is clear now that Tacitus views them, and wants his reader to view them, as a serious problem for the Roman state.

7.4 WHEN WILL NERO BE PUNISHED? THE PROBLEMS OF PRODIGIES

In the chapters following Agrippina's death, Tacitus constructs a narrative of prodigies indicating divine disapproval of Nero's other transgressive behaviors. The placement of these notices indicates that the gods' anger is partly directed at Nero's love of athletic and artistic performance, which he uses the rhetoric of cult to justify:⁶³ "Certainly songs were sacred to Apollo, and that chief prophetic divinity was present in such adornment not only in Greek cities, but at Roman temples" (*Ann.* 14.14.1 *enimvero cantus Apollini sacros, talique ornatu adstare non modo Graecis in urbibus sed Romana apud templum numen praecipuum et praescium*). In appropriating Rome's traditional worship of Apollo as god of prophecy and song to justify his much maligned affinity for the type of performance considered beneath the dignity of freeborn Romans, Nero shows he is only concerned with traditions of cultic memory when he thinks they can help him justify a transgressive desire.

⁶³ Cf. Davies 2004, 199; Champlin 2003, 120.

Using Apollo Citharoedus to justify musical performance also becomes problematic when it affects how Nero's subjects treat him. He drafts (*Ann.* 14.15.5 *conscripti sunt*) a troop of young attractive men to serve as his hired applauders: "They rang out with applause day and night, addressing the *princeps*' beauty and voice with terms used for the gods" (14.15.5 *ii dies ac noctes plausibus personare, formam principis vocemque deum vocabulis appellantes*). Since these applauders were presumably hired by Nero himself, it is also possible that he instructed them on what to say; if so, their worshipful adoration of his appearance and voice is a much more obvious case of an emperor actively wishing his subjects to see and treat him as divine than we have seen so far in the *Annals*.⁶⁴ It also shows the readiness of flattery to adapt to new Imperial excesses: it is easy to pivot from using Apollo to justify Nero's performances to worshipping Nero almost as if he were Apollo.⁶⁵ All this shows the deleterious effect of Nero's transgressiveness on societal discourse.

Tacitus' placement of the report of a prodigious occurrence in AD 60 suggests that the gods disapprove of Nero's association with Apollo. While recounting Nero's performances, Tacitus describes a comet:

Inter quae sidus cometes effulsit, de quo vulgi opinio est, tamquam mutationem regis portendat. igitur, quasi iam depulso Nerone, quisnam deligeretur anquirebant. et omnium ore Rubellius Plautus celebra<ba>tur. (*Ann.* 14.22.1)

(Meanwhile, a comet gleamed out, about which the crowd's opinion is that it portends a change of king. Therefore, as if Nero had already been deposed, they tried to discover who was chosen, and Rubellius Plautus was celebrated in everyone's mouth.)

The theory of the *vulgus* about comets possibly derives from the comet that appeared after Julius Caesar's death,⁶⁶ but, as Seneca *Q Nat.* 7.17.2 points out, this comet is not like Caesar's; he, like Tacitus, thinks it did not portend Nero's death and a change of ruler.⁶⁷ Yet Tacitus does not deny that supernatural significance attaches to comets, or even to this comet. *Tamquam* with the subjunctive does not imply doubt, but gives the contents of the opinion of the *vulgus*.⁶⁸ Their error is in automatically applying a preconceived idea about

⁶⁴ Dio's more extreme version has these applauders addressing Nero as Apollo and swearing by his name (61.20.5); see also Gatti 1976, 108–10; Mourgues 1988, 165–6. For the tradition of hired applauders in Roman theater, see Mourgues 1988, 157–8.

⁶⁵ There is ample evidence for the identification or association of Nero with Apollo during his lifetime; see Eden 1984, 78; Griffin 1984, 121, 217–18; Champlin 2003, ch. 5.

⁶⁶ Rogers 1953, 243; Grzybek 1999, 117.

⁶⁷ Williams 2012, 260–1; cf. Gurval 1997, 43–4. Seneca generally criticizes people who attach too much significance to natural phenomena: see Williams 2006, 128 (on earthquakes), and Williams 2012, 259 (on comets). Seneca probably saw the comet of AD 60 personally (Ramsey 2006, 142–3).

⁶⁸ On *tamquam*, see Ch. 6 n. 10 and references there cited. The use of *vulgus* may imply disapproval, but probably just means that the view represents public opinion (Newbold 1976, 88–91).

what comets should mean to this particular comet: the present tense of *est* and *portendat* implies the application of a general theory about comets to a specific occurrence (perfect *effulsit*). Nero will be deposed eventually, but Rubellius Plautus will not be the next *princeps*, as the reader knows; the theory that comets can portend a change of ruler may be valid sometimes, but it does not apply here. But just because the *vulgus* is wrong does not mean the comet is a good sign. Comets were almost never interpreted by the Romans as a sign that something positive would occur, and they appear in prodigy lists as signs of divine displeasure.⁶⁹ Tacitus' report of the comet therefore suggests the gods' disapproval of Nero's recent actions and also provides a timely reminder about the difficulty of interpreting supernatural occurrences.

Next, Tacitus reports a portentous lightning strike, which strengthens the impression of divine dissatisfaction intimated by the comet, but also presents interpretive difficulties:

auxit rumorem pari vanitate orta interpretatio fulguris. nam quia discumbentis Neronis apud Simbruina stagna <in villa> cui Sublaqueum nomen est ictae dapes mensaque disiecta erat, idque finibus Tiburtum acciderat, unde paterna Plauto origo, hunc illum numine deum destinari credebant, fovebantque multi quibus nova et ancipitia praecolere avida et plerumque fallax ambitio est. ergo permotus his Nero componit ad Plautum litteras, consuleret quieti urbis seque prava diffamantibus subtrahere. (*Ann.* 14.22.2–3)

(An interpretation of a lightning bolt that arose from equal vanity increased the rumor. For because Nero's meal was struck and his table shattered as he was dining at the Simbruine Lakes in a villa called Sublaqueum, and because that had happened in the territory of Tibur, where Plautus' father had come from, they believed that he was the one marked out by the gods' divine power, and he was supported by many whose greedy and usually deceptive ambition was to worship prematurely the new and dangerous. Therefore, moved by all this, Nero composed a letter to Plautus, saying that he should make provision for peacefulness in the city and remove himself from those who were spreading wicked slander.)

The lightning bolt is not necessarily meaningless, since Nero will in fact come to a bad end, but assuming that Plautus will be the one to replace him is described as *vanitas*, and it is ambition and greed that cause this hasty interpretation. Even Nero is taken in by the strength of the rumor.⁷⁰ Tacitus gives us a timely warning against letting political concerns determine a sign's significance, which may only become clear with hindsight. The Roman people are as wrong to apply the comet and the lightning to Plautus as they were to believe that the regrowth of the *ficus* (13.58) meant Nero would improve. For

⁶⁹ Krauss 1930, 77–8; Gurval 1997, 44–5; Williams 2012, 259. Caesar's comet, publicized by Octavian as a positive sign, is therefore the exception rather than the rule; see also, however, Pandey 2013, 407–15.

⁷⁰ See Gibson 1998 on Tacitean rumors.

the lightning bolt, while it does not mean Rubellius Plautus will rise, certainly suggests Nero will fall. Lightning strikes are of course traditionally signs of divine wrath, but lightning strikes that are specifically targeted in this way are frequently signs of the impending deaths of emperors. Of Claudius, for example, it was said that his father's tomb was struck by lightning and that a comet appeared as heralds of his death.⁷¹ Tacitus reports neither of these events in his account of Claudius' demise, but for Nero he includes both a comet and a targeted thunderbolt, suggesting he intends the reader to take seriously the narrative pattern, selectively deployed, of these particular occurrences as signs that Nero would come to a bad end, even if he does not endorse the interpretation of those signs as having any relationship to Rubellius Plautus. Nero would die, and Rome would have a new leader, but not when anyone supposed. People in contemporary Rome, not least the emperor himself, are surprisingly lackadaisical about the lightning bolt: whereas Nero had duly followed a recommendation of the haruspices and purified the city after lightning struck all fourteen *regiones*, this time no consultation of experts is described. Although the *princeps* himself is increasingly the specific target of divine anger, he has apparently abandoned his concern with the traditional apparatus for neutralizing those threats.

Tacitus confirms the truth of such signs by closing the chapter with a third, less ambiguous than the first two:

Isdem diebus nimia luxur cupidō infamiam et periculum Neroni tulit, quia fontem aquae Marciae ad urbem deductae nando incesserat; videbaturque potus sacros et caerimoniam loci corpore loto polluisse. secutaque anceps validudo iram deum adfirmavit. (*Ann.* 14.22.4)

(During the same days, too great a desire for luxury brought infamy and danger to Nero, because he had entered the spring of the Aqua Marcia, which has been brought down to the city, for a swim. It seemed that by washing his body, he had polluted the sacred drink and the sacredness of the place, and his subsequent ill health confirmed the gods' wrath.)

The last two sentences, linked by corresponding *-ques*, emphasize that it both seemed, and was in fact the case, that the wrathful gods were punishing Nero for bathing in, and thereby polluting, the Aqua Marcia's spring; Tacitus clearly affirms a cause-and-effect relationship between human transgression and divine retribution.⁷² Nero's wish to bathe in the spring recalls his "long-held desire" for

⁷¹ Suet. *Claud.* 46. Further examples include Suet. *Aug.* 97.2 and Dio 56.29.4 (lightning strikes the inscription on Augustus' statue and melts the "C" of "Caesar"); Suet. *Dom.* 15.2 (the temple of the Flavian family, the palace, and Domitian's bedroom are all struck by lightning). See also Krauss 1930, 44–6; Lorsch Wildfang 2000, 77.

⁷² Cf. Koestermann 1968, 70. The Aqua Marcia was renowned in antiquity as providing the purest water of all the aqueducts; cf. Pliny *HN* 34.41; Vitruvius 8.9; Frontinus *Aq.* 7. On reverence for *fontes*, see Servius on *Aen.* 7.84; Koestermann 1968, 70; Edlund-Berry 2006, 166, 173–5. On *polluisse* as a term for ritual pollution, see Lennon 2014, 33–4.

performance (14.15.1 *vetus cupido*), also religiously problematic;⁷³ but *luxus* also plays a role. Luxury was dangerous, as Berry notes, “because it signified the presence of the potentially disruptive power of human desire . . . which must be policed,”⁷⁴ and Nero’s illness shows that the gods feel the same way about his trivial, personal use of a revered spring. His flagrant disregard has clear consequences for both his reputation and his personal safety. By representing these consequences in an unusually clear way, Tacitus emphasizes the gods’ power to indicate their displeasure and to punish transgressions. Since Nero has just performed the far greater transgression of killing his mother, and is about to murder his wife, Tacitus implies that the gods may punish these acts, too. Indeed, part of what is so problematic about Nero in particular bathing in the spring is the crimes he has committed; the traditional punishment of the sack for someone who has committed patricide is designed to keep the body of the dangerously polluted murderer from coming into contact with, and thereby tainting, the river or sea into which he was thrown.⁷⁵ So while signs offer humans no clues about when the events they foretell will come to pass, they are nevertheless true indicators of the gods’ displeasure towards Nero and the punishment they will ultimately visit upon him.

7.5 OCTAVIA’S DEATH AND GROWING *ADULATIO*

Nero’s transgressions do not end with Agrippina’s murder, nor does the displeasure of the gods or even the flattery of his subjects that expresses itself in cultic commemorations of the *princeps*’ worst atrocities. Religious flattery rises to yet more problematic heights with Octavia’s death. She has been divorced and sent away into Campania, but a rumor arises that Nero will recall her (*Ann.* 14.60.5).⁷⁶ In response, the *vulgus* displays enthusiastic support for Octavia:⁷⁷

Exim laeti Capitolium scandunt deosque tandem venerantur. effigies Poppaeae proruunt, Octaviae imagines gestant umeris, spargunt floribus foroque ac templis statuunt. itur etiam in principis laudes, repetitum <certamen> venerantium.

(14.61.1)

(Immediately they ascended the Capitoline happily and finally venerated the gods. They toppled statues of Poppaea and carried images of Octavia on their

⁷³ Cf. Davies 2004, 199.

⁷⁴ Berry 1994, 63. See also *Ann.* 3.55, with Woodman and Martin 1996, 404–5.

⁷⁵ Lennon 2014, 95–6; see also this chapter, n. 31.

⁷⁶ On the lacuna in the text at here, see Furneaux 1907, 308; Koestermann 1968, 147; Ferri 1998, 346 n. 10; Woodman 2004, 303 n. 113.

⁷⁷ Mentioned at *Ann.* 14.60.5, the *vulgus* is presumably still the subject of *scandunt*, *venerantur*, etc. in 14.61.1.

shoulders, scattered flowers, and set them up in the Forum and the temples. It actually extended to praise of the *princeps*, the repeated contest of people venerating him.)

Treating statues in a certain way to express favor or disfavor is not a new phenomenon in the *Annals*,⁷⁸ but here Tacitus gives the motif special resonance by adding triumphal and cultic imagery. *Spargunt floribus* refers to the flowers strewn on the roads during a triumphal procession, and *Capitolium scandere* (a rare phrase occurring only seven times in extant Latin literature) refers to the *triumphator's* ascent of the Capitoline to sacrifice to Jupiter, or to priests and priestesses climbing the hill to perform rituals (cf. Horace *Carm.* 3.30.8–9).⁷⁹ Combining popular enthusiasm for Octavia with the Capitoline's religious ceremonies thus implies that Octavia's recall is a divine blessing, a rarity in Nero's irreligious court, as *tandem* implies,⁸⁰ yet worship of the gods quickly becomes worship of Nero. The repetition of *venerare* implies that people cannot distinguish between the honors due to a divinity and those due to an emperor. Juxtaposed with the cultic triumphal imagery and the ascent to the Capitoline, features absent from parallel accounts,⁸¹ this worshipful treatment of the emperor shows once again a breakdown in cultic memory. Tacitus' addition of the religious element emphasizes how *adulatio* leads the people onto religious ground as shaky as Nero's matricide and murder of his wife. *Tandem* can work in a less positive way: it "compresses the retrospect of a whole generation's despair,"⁸² which makes the people too ready to treat Octavia to a "triumph" based only on a rumor. Whereas triumphs used to involve commemoration of great military victories and sacrifices to Jupiter that pleased the gods, now this false triumph involves commemoration of a rumor of Imperial favor and acts of worship for Nero which do not even manage to win *his* favor (since he sends soldiers to break up the crowd, 14.61.1). This is yet another example of how the deteriorations in cultic memory that have plagued the principate since the beginning of the *Annals* are now bearing yet more problematic fruit in the reign of Nero. Arguably, if the triumph's cultic dimensions had not been so neglected, warped, or ignored under Tiberius, they would not now be misused to flatter Nero and celebrate a short-lived reprieve for his wife.

This ritual-based flattery actually intensifies after Octavia's brutal murder:

dona ob haec templis decreta que<m> ad finem memorabimus? quicumque casus
temporum illorum nobis vel aliis auctoribus noscent, praesumptum habeant,

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ann.* 3.14.4 (Piso) and 5.4.2 (the elder Nero and Agrippina).

⁷⁹ Flowers: see Furneaux 1907, 308–9; Koestermann 1968, 148. *Capitolium scandere*: see Livy 4.2.14, 42.49.6, and 45.39.2. On the Horace passage, see §0.1, pp. 7–8.

⁸⁰ Woodcock 1939, 148.

⁸¹ Neither Suet. *Ner.* 35 nor *Octavia Praetexta* 780–819 mentions the Capitoline.

⁸² Walker 1952, 68.

quotiens fugas et caedes iussit princeps, totiens grates deis actas, quaeque rerum secundarum olim, tum publicae cladis insignia fuisse. neque tamen silebimus, si quod senatus consultum adulatione novum aut patientia postremum fuit.

(Ann. 14.64.3)

(To what end shall I recall the gifts decreed in the temples on account of these events? Anyone who finds out about the misfortunes of those times either from me or from other authorities should take it as assumed that whenever the *princeps* ordered exiles and murders, thanks were given to the gods, and that the things which were once characteristic of success were at that time the accoutrements of public disaster. Nevertheless, I will not keep silent if a decree of the Senate was unprecedented in its sycophancy or at the extreme of subservience.)

The fact that these offerings in the temple are the result of decrees indicates that they were enacted by the Senate, and the thanksgivings offered to the gods are probably likewise to be read as *supplicationes* mandated by the Senate. The endless adulatory decrees that Tacitus describes here, then, are a logical extension of senatorial decrees of cult activity made during the reign of Tiberius, for example, after the execution of Titius Sabinus (4.74.2).⁸³ Similarly, Nero earns cultic commemoration of his murder of his wife, and for countless other transgressions after that. The dedications now offered in temples for Nero's crimes recall the traditional offerings made by commanders who had been victorious in war giving part of their plunder to the gods.⁸⁴ In a semantic shift recalling Thucydides' description of the effect of stasis on Greek values (Thuc. 3.82.4–5),⁸⁵ *insignia rerum secundarum* have become *insignia publicae cladis*, since a religious ritual that should signify a great military victory is now celebrated to flatter a murderer *princeps*. Tacitus shows the importance he attaches to this deterioration by promising to chronicle new developments in senatorial obsequiousness, much as he did following one Tiberian senator's proposal that the *fetiales* should be involved in the celebration of Livia's recovery from illness, something that falls outside their traditional remit (3.64.3–4).⁸⁶ The similarity between these two episodes shows that while Tacitus here links Nero's behavior with the trivialization of important religious ceremonies and deterioration in cultic memory more clearly than he ever has before, the seed of this now deep-rooted problem was planted long ago. Nero's impieties are certainly extreme, and the Senate's responses to them are certainly excessive, but these are differences of degree, not of kind. The uncountable proliferation of these obsequious cult acts, showing a staggering misunderstanding of the situations in which such dedications and thanksgivings are

⁸³ On the passage, see §4.6, pp. 208–9.

⁸⁴ For such dedications, cf. Ann. 15.41.1, 15.45.1, with Shannon 2012, 759–60; see also Orlin 1997, 135–9.

⁸⁵ Cf. Walker 1952, 79: "Rome has become a hideous burlesque of its lost self."

⁸⁶ On the passage, see §3.5, pp. 163–4.

actually appropriate, is no new phenomenon, but the evolution or progression of an old problem.

Tacitus also makes clear, by expressing this authorial comment as an issue that will remain a problem for the remainder of the *Annals*, that it is not just the murder of Octavia, but the general trend of religious flattery in response to Nero's crimes, that is problematic. And subsequent occurrences continue to suggest that the gods are displeased. Tacitus reports a string of ominous events at the end of his account of AD 62, sandwiched between the Parthian disaster (*Ann.* 15.17) and the birth of Poppaea's daughter:

Isdem consulibus gymnasium ictu fulminibus conflagravit, effigiesque in eo Neronis ad informe aes liquefacta. et motu terrae celebre Campaniae oppidum Pompei magna ex parte proruit; defunctaque virgo Vestalis Laelia, in cuius locum Cornelia ex familia Cossorum capta est. (15.22.2)

(Under the same consuls, a gymnasium burned down from a strike of lightning, and the statue of Nero in it was melted to shapeless bronze. And the populous Campanian town of Pompeii collapsed in large part from an earthquake; and the Vestal Virgil Laelia died, in whose place Cornelia from the family of the Cossi was taken on.)

The destruction of Nero's gymnasium, built at the end of the previous year (14.47.2), and the melting of his statue do not augur well for his principate's eventual outcome. If we are to see this as a bad omen, as people interpreted the similar collapse of the amphitheater at Fidenae in Tiberius' reign (4.62), this is much more specifically targeted at Nero himself. Whereas the focus of Tacitus' description of the event at Fidenae emphasized the great loss of human life, here Nero's molten statue is the only loss mentioned. The lightning that sparked the fire can also be seen as one in a series of increasingly targeted strikes: it struck the Capitoline (13.24.2), all of Rome (14.12.1), and then Nero's feast (14.22.2), but now seems to have moved even closer, to an image of Nero himself. The earthquakes, however, seem to have expanded: the ones in Claudius' prodigy list merely destroyed houses (12.43.1 *crebris terrae motibus prorutae domus*), but now the entire town of Pompeii is engulfed.⁸⁷ Although nothing initially appears ominous about Cornelia, she is probably the Vestal put to death for *incestum* in AD 90.⁸⁸ Tacitus thus creates links both backward in time within Nero's reign (to AD 61, when the gymnasium was dedicated) and forward into "Rome's post-Neronian future," when

⁸⁷ Seneca *Q Nat.* 6.1.2 dates the Campanian earthquake to AD 63. Perhaps Tacitus deliberately moved the earthquake to the end of 62 to increase the sense of gathering gloom (Hine 1984, 268), or perhaps two different earthquakes are referred to; there is evidence of a series of earthquakes before Pompeii's final destruction in AD 79 (see recently Taylor 2015, 288–90).

⁸⁸ Pigón 1999, 209. See also the arguments of Rüpke 2008, 630 n. 2. For Laelia, see Rüpke 2008, 757; for Cornelia, Rüpke 2008, 630.

the cataclysmic eruption of Vesuvius destroyed Pompeii altogether in AD 79 and an impious Vestal Virgin was punished in AD 90.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, although they have parallels in earlier prodigy lists, these events are not explicitly described as *prodigia*. Some commentators attribute this to Tacitus' skepticism about omens as valid predictors of the future;⁹⁰ others say these incidents *do* predict the future and are indistinguishable from the *prodigia*, since they serve the same purpose.⁹¹ Placing these events at the end of the year, however, strongly encourages the reader to see them as significant; although they are not explicitly given predictive value, the ominous air they lend, and the combination of specific danger to Nero and generalized danger to the state that they seem to suggest, makes them functionally indistinguishable from other events which Tacitus does specifically say are prodigies. Yet, by not calling them *prodigia* here, Tacitus illustrates the phenomenon he observed at *Ann.* 14.12.2: he mimics the mindset of witnesses to these evidently significant events, who ignored them and allowed Nero's wicked reign to continue. The slight ambiguity in whether or not these events are prodigious is also reflected in how forward-looking some of them are. Other prodigies about the statues of emperors suggest that such destructions generally occur as a sign of imminent demise.⁹² Nero, however, will remain in power for several more years, so the melting of his statue, much like the comet (14.22.1), is not an omen that his death is coming in the immediate future. Similarly, Cornelia would be known to Tacitus' readers, but, without the benefit of hindsight, the Romans of AD 62 could be forgiven for allowing her accession to pass unnoticed. Nevertheless, these earthquakes are similar enough to the ones that *did* attract attention in Claudius' reign (cf. 12.43.1) that Tacitus may be trying to suggest a general decrease in sensitivity to ominous occurrences in this the last principate of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. This "prodigy" list thus becomes an illustration of the erosion of cultic memory under Nero. Even under Claudius people were alive to the traditional interpretation of signs, but now no one is aware of the ways they should be interpreted. Yet the repeated motifs in these prodigy lists also suggests a longer pattern of divine anger: perhaps part of the reason for these continued spates of lightning strikes and earthquakes is that even when people have been aware of prodigies' warnings, they were not sufficiently literate in traditional Roman ritual to do anything to fix the pattern. Combined with the perversion of religious rituals for Octavia is a blindness toward things traditionally seen as signs.

Alongside indifference to prodigies, another deleterious trend of Nero's principate persists: senatorial flattery that takes the form of new religious

⁸⁹ Pigón 1999, 210. ⁹⁰ Furneaux 1907, 345; Koestermann 1968, 203.

⁹¹ Miller 1973, 73; Davies 2004, 200 and 205 n. 188.

⁹² See Suet. *Dom.* 15.2; *Vit.* 9. See also n. 173.

rituals. Tacitus relates the Senate's decrees at the beginning of his account of AD 63, in the very next chapter after the ominous occurrences of AD 62, suggesting again the senators' indifference to divine anger. If one of the major religious problems of the principate has been inscribing members of the Imperial family into Rome's cultic calendar and landscape for the sole purpose of flattery, these senators are not aware of the problem.

Memmio Regulo et Verginio Rufo consulibus natam sibi ex Poppaea filiam Nero ultra mortale gaudium accepit appellavitque Augustam dato et Poppaeae eodem cognomento. locus puerperio colonia Antium fuit, ubi ipse generatus erat. iam senatus uterum Poppaeae commendaverat dis votaue publice susceperat, quae multiplicata exolutaque. et additae supplicationes templumque fecunditatis et certamen ad exemplar Actiacae religionis decretum, utque Fortunarum effigies aureae in solio Capitolini Iovis locarentur, ludicrum circense, ut Iuliae genti apud Bovillas, ita Claudiae Domitiaeque apud Antium ederetur. quae fluxa fuere, quartum intra mensem defuncta infante. rursusque exortae adulationes censentium honorem divae et pulvinar aedemque et sacerdotem. (*Ann.* 15.23.1–3)

(In the consulship of Memmius Regulus and Verginius Rufus, Nero heard with superhuman joy the news that a daughter had been born to him by Poppaea; and he called her Augusta, with the same title being given to Poppaea as well. The site of the birth was the colony of Antium, where he himself had been born. Already the Senate had commended Poppaea's womb to the gods and undertaken vows at state expense, which were multiplied and discharged. And supplications were added, and a temple of Fertility, and a contest on the model of the Actian ritual was decreed, and that golden effigies of the Fortunes should be placed upon the throne of Capitoline Jupiter, and that circus games should be performed at Antium for the Claudian and Domitian families like the ones for the Julian clan at Bovillae. All this was fleeting, since the infant died within the fourth month. And again flatteries arose, from people proposing the honor of a *diva* and a *pulvinar*, temple, and priest.)

The Senate's response confirms Nero's superhuman emotion and the sense that the Imperial house's milestones are of supernatural interest. The commemorations proposed for Poppaea's daughter show again the decline in cultic memory under Nero: the senators' suggestions adapt cult acts to a situation for which they are not appropriate, the celebration of the birth of a baby girl. Some of the ritual commemorations they deploy are traditional acts drawn from longstanding honors usually deployed for the gods, such as the dedications for Jupiter on the Capitoline; instead of traditionally commemorating real military victory, the Neronian Senate erects meaningless trophies on the Capitoline to memorialize a nonexistent Parthian victory (cf. 15.18.1) and a short-lived infant girl. The Fortunes, goddesses worshipped in Antium and traditionally seen to safeguard Rome's success in both war and peace, are similarly inappropriate given the recent lack of wartime Roman fortune in Parthia. The goddesses in their oracular mode also became associated with

protection for members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty,⁹³ but here that protection proves not to have been granted, since Poppaea's daughter dies in infancy. In proposing additions to Capitoline Jupiter's throne, a *pulvinar*, and a new temple to the deified infant after her death, the Senate suggests alterations to Rome's physical religious fabric; by adding her to the list of gods celebrated in the *lectisternium*, they also propose an alteration to the city's ritual fabric.

Other items in Tacitus' list of honors are adaptations of more recent instruments of cultic commemoration devised for Imperial cult and discussed elsewhere in the *Annals*. These have been expanded by a populace eager to flatter their emperor, and are now applied not only to the emperor himself, but also to increasingly inappropriate members of the Imperial family. Public vows for the emperor's safety were normal, but commending Poppaea's womb to the gods and building a temple of personified fertility smack of flattery.⁹⁴ The temple can be usefully compared to the *ara adoptionis* proposed to honor Livia, which Tiberius opposed (*Ann.* 1.14.2): both would inscribe the dynastic connections of a female member of the Imperial house into Rome's cultic memory by creating new sites for worship. But Tiberius prevented this from happening (1.14.2 *prohibuit*), whereas in Neronian Rome there is no opposition. Furthermore, *publice* suggests that these commemorations, in being financed by the state, are considered part of the state cult apparatus. Tacitus' description also suggests that even the cult of Augustus is now imperfectly understood: modelling games in honor of an infant girl with no personal achievements after those Augustus instituted to celebrate his great victory at Actium shows that the Actian games no longer mean anything to a Neronian Senate.⁹⁵ With this in view, Tiberius' words when declining a temple for himself in Spain seem in retrospect prophetic: "The honor for Augustus will vanish if it is made common by indiscriminate flattery" (4.37.3 *et vanescet Augusti honor, si promiscis adulationibus vulgatur*). This is exactly what pseudo-Actian games in honor of a short-lived infant reveal has happened by the time of Nero's reign, and little wonder: even Tiberius himself, as we saw, did not take very seriously his cultic obligations to commemorate his predecessor, dedicating temples to Augustus only when it suited him, and failing to dedicate a site of cultic commemoration in the city of Rome itself.⁹⁶ So this flattery in Nero's reign makes clear how Imperial cult can devolve in a society devoid of understanding of or commitment to cultic memory, with emperors who fail to provide effective leadership on the matter. Tacitus is not criticizing emperor cult as an institution; choosing a powerless infant to deify does not

⁹³ Koestermann 1968, 205; Matthews 2011, 31–3.

⁹⁴ Beard et al. 1998, 252; Rüpke 2007, 163. Vows and sacrifices for Poppaea's well-being during pregnancy and delivery are recorded in the Arval *Acta*: *CIL* 6.2043 = Scheid 1998, no. 29 col. I lines 19–21. On flattery, see Clark 2007, 267.

⁹⁵ Koestermann 1968, 205.

⁹⁶ See §4.6, pp. 199–201, and §5.7, pp. 232–3.

per se invalidate the institution of deification,⁹⁷ but it reveals the Senate's obsequiousness and lack of any sense of religious appropriateness. The Senate and people have become practiced at trotting out dubious religious honors, showing how emperor cult's deleterious dynamic has progressed since Tiberius' principate.

7.6 THE HORRIBLE YEAR AD 64

Having set up a pattern of increasing flattery and the expectation of divine anger in his account of the first ten years of Nero's reign, Tacitus reaches a climax with his retelling of the events of AD 64, in which the magnitude of the gods' anger, and of Nero's impieties, reaches new heights.⁹⁸ Tacitus replays elements of Nero's transgressiveness that we have seen already, this time linking them more explicitly with a suggestion that the gods are angry. Tacitus juxtaposes Nero's more obvious instances of sacrilege with further evidence of his transgressive interest in performance; this connection suggests we are to see both facets of Nero as inspiring anger in the gods. The reactions of Nero's subjects in both instances are extremely important: both suggest a greater concern with and knowledge of cultic memory among the people than Tacitus has previously suggested, even if those impulses ultimately fail to change Nero's behavior.

Tacitus opens his account of the year by revisiting Nero's religiously problematic desire for performance. Nero wishes to travel to Greece to participate in the famous games, "so that, after crossing into Achaëa and acquiring the crowns that had been hallowed from ancient times, with an enhanced reputation he could elicit the citizens' enthusiasm" (*Ann.* 15.33.2 *ut transgressus in Achaïam insignesque et antiquitus sacras coronas adeptus maiore fama studia civium eliceret*). Nero knows full well that the games he wishes to participate in are religious festivals, and that the crowns he would win there are objects with ritual significance, yet he wishes to win them only for self-aggrandizement. But his presumption that Greece's ancient cultic traditions exist only to enhance his own reputation has not come out of nowhere: it has identifiable antecedents in the embassies of Greek states to Tiberius, where the ritual details of the cities' ancient cults were of only intermittent interest to the Senate and emperor, and where a history of loyalty to Rome often carried more weight than venerable religious traditions.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Davies 2004, 180.

⁹⁸ Some of the observations in this section appeared in Shannon 2012.

⁹⁹ On the passages, see §3.4 (on *Ann.* 3.60–3), §4.3, pp. 174–5 (on 4.14), §4.5, pp. 192–3 and 198–9 (on 4.43 and 4.55–6).

The growing inability of Romans, particularly the Senate, to cope with or summon an interest in Greek cults, combined with the egocentrism of Nero, has resulted in a state where victors' crowns and their ties to ancient cult practice are important merely as a vehicle for enhancing Imperial reputation.

Tacitus pairs this observation of Nero's with the story of another collapse of an amphitheater, suggesting divine displeasure at the emperor's attitude to Greek festivals. As a result of his desire for Hellenic glory (*Ann.* 15.33.3 *ergo*), Nero fills an amphitheater in Naples with a large audience for his next performance:

Illic, plerique ut arbitra<ba>ntur, triste, ut ipse, providum potius et secundis numinibus evenit: nam egresso qui adfuerat populo vacuum et sine ullius noxa theatrum collapsum est. ergo per compositos cantus grates dis atque ipsam recentis casus fortunam celebrans petiturusque maris Hadriae traiectus apud Beneventum interim consedit. (15.34.1)

(Then something occurred that was sad, as most thought—but, as he himself thought, it was rather an act of providence and favorable divinities. For after all the people who had been present had exited, the empty theater collapsed without doing any harm to anyone. Therefore, giving thanks to the gods in composed songs and celebrating the very fortune of the recent disaster, while waiting for a crossing of the Adriatic he meanwhile took up position at Beneventum.)

By highlighting the difference between the widespread interpretation of the collapse and Nero's interpretation, Tacitus portrays the emperor as out of touch. The negative implications are evident to everyone but Nero himself, and his interpretation looks like a misinterpretation.¹⁰⁰ Yet, although the Roman people feel uneasy about the incident, they do not contradict his reading of the disaster. Compare this with Tacitus' report of the collapse of the amphitheater at Fidenae under Tiberius, when the event was popularly (and probably, Tacitus implies, falsely) considered prodigious but the emperor was able to distract public attention from that interpretation by donating money for compensation (4.64.1), and it is easy to see how the dynamics between emperor and subjects that were established years ago have penetrated deeply. Nero's subjects identify the collapse as *triste*, which could signify merely that they think it is sad (*OLD* s.v. *tristis* 2), or that they believe it is ominous (5b). Nero not only convinces them that it is not a bad omen, but actually asserts that it is a *good* one, to be celebrated with acts of worship. Still, Nero's interpretation of the collapse is not necessarily implausible and recalls Claudius' attribution of Rome's narrow escape from famine to "the kindness of the gods" (12.43.2).¹⁰¹ The fact that this occurs at Beneventum may be significant, too: the city had originally been called Maleventum, but that

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Davies 2004, 161.

¹⁰¹ On the passage, see §6.5, pp. 270–1.

ill-omened name was changed at the time of the Roman colonization,¹⁰² an externally imposed shift from “bad” to “good” omen that mirrors what Tacitus describes for the amphitheater collapse. It is possible to think that the fact that no one died does indicate that the gods are still capable of sparing Rome from disaster. But if taken in the context of the gymnasium struck by lightning and Nero’s statue melted two years previously (15.22.2), the amphitheater’s collapse forms part of a larger pattern. As Tacitus has suggested throughout the *Annals*, it is difficult to tell when something is ominous and when it is not; but Nero’s celebrations, which stifle the more negative feelings of his subjects, show a lack of sensitivity to what might well be a sign of divine displeasure at Nero’s love of performance.

Yet even Nero is apparently still capable of sensing the wrath of the gods, as Tacitus indicates in his description of the circumstances of his proposed trip to Egypt after the sojourn to Greece is abandoned:

super ea profectione adiit Capitolium. illic veneratus deos, cum Vestae quoque templum inisset, repente cunctos per artus tremens, seu numine exterrente, seu facinorum recordatione numquam timore vacuus, deseruit inceptum, cunctas sibi curas amore patriae leviores dictitans. (*Ann.* 15.36.1–2)

(He approached the Capitoline about that departure. After venerating the gods there, when he had also gone into the temple of Vesta, suddenly he trembled in all his limbs—whether because the divinity was frightening him, or because he was never free of fear because of the remembrance of his crimes—and he gave up on his undertaking, saying repeatedly that all of his concerns were less important to him than love of his fatherland.)

Tacitus’ use of the phrase *adire Capitolium* evokes the ceremony of the triumph, an institution Nero has subverted before, after the murder of his mother (cf. 14.13.2). It also calls to mind the *nuncupatio votorum*, in which a commander about to depart on a campaign made vows to Jupiter Capitolinus to be fulfilled on his return, as part of his triumph if he were to be awarded one.¹⁰³ These resonances show that Nero has no sense of religious appropriateness: he was wrong to treat matricide as a military victory, but he was equally wrong to see this frivolous Egyptian tour as equivalent to a military expedition.¹⁰⁴

Locating the incident in Vesta’s temple is important, too. Since a real *nuncupatio* would have taken place on the Capitoline, it is odd that a temple

¹⁰² Livy 9.27.14 (with Oakley 2005a, 328–9), Pliny *HN* 3.105. I am grateful to A. J. Woodman for bringing this to my attention.

¹⁰³ Versnel 1970, 181–5; Oakley 2005b, 98. Cf. Livy 42.49.1–2, 45.39.11; Aug. *RG* 4.1. Augustus apparently revived this Republican practice (Gagé 1935, 78). On *nuncupare*, see §6.6, p. 279 and n. 135.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the *ovatio* obsequiously suggested by Cornelius Dolabella, and rejected by Tiberius, at *Ann.* 3.47.3–4 (with Woodman and Martin 1996, 355–7).

in the Forum is the site of his sudden attack of conscience, and commentators have variously tried to explain the significance of Vesta here.¹⁰⁵ One factor may be the special relationship that Nero as *pontifex maximus* would have had with the goddess's cult, particularly evident in the house adjacent to the temple of Vesta in which the *pontifex maximus* lived until the time of Augustus, and in the *pontifex maximus*' role in the selection of new Vestals.¹⁰⁶ The goddess also has important associations with the eternity of Rome: her temple housed the *palladium* brought by Aeneas from Troy, which guaranteed Rome's continued existence.¹⁰⁷ Juxtaposing this venerable goddess with Nero's fake *nuncupatio* is striking. This is bad for the emperor himself, but also for Rome as a whole: as Davies notes, "[Nero's] inability to stop shaking in the temple of Vesta . . . meant that he cannot even *consult* the gods about his planned trip . . . never mind gain their approval."¹⁰⁸ When even the *pontifex maximus* is terrified of a goddess with whose cult he is intimately associated, this is a damning indictment of his poor relationship with Roman religious traditions.

Nero's reaction nevertheless shows awareness that the gods are punishing him for his impious crimes. Tacitus gives us two alternative explanations for his trembling: the active intervention of the goddess (*numine*) or Nero's own mental contemplations of what he has done (*recordatione*). In fact, these two options are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since psychological disturbance is one possible manifestation of divine wrath.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the goddess of hearth and home is stimulating Nero's conscience, already guilty about his murders of brother, mother, and wife. Compared with the parallel account of Suetonius, Tacitus' Nero seems more aware, or more likely to be aware, of this potential connection. Suetonius relates the same episode without reporting this realization; his Nero cancels the trip because he is "disturbed by religious scruple and danger" (*Ner. 19.1 turbatus religione simul ac periculo*), but it never occurs to him that the gods might punish his matricide and fratricide.¹¹⁰ Tacitus' Nero, however, seems to understand what Tacitus has indicated to the

¹⁰⁵ Furneaux 1907, 360 cites Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.67, claiming that Vesta was consulted last in all prayers. In actuality there is little evidence for this (cf. Pease 1958, 725–6). Koestermann 1968, 228–9 notes Vesta's special connection with the Imperial house.

¹⁰⁶ For the *pontifex maximus*' house in the Forum, see Richardson 1992, 328; Scott 1993; Beard et al. 1998, 189. On the selection of Vestals, see van Haepelen 2002, 96–9, 104–5; Stepper 2003, 168–73. See also Ch. 6 n. 69 and references there cited.

¹⁰⁷ See Livy 5.52.7, Ovid *Fast.* 6.435–6; Charlesworth 1936, esp. 122–3.

¹⁰⁸ Davies 2004, 200, where "Egypt" should be understood instead of "Greece."

¹⁰⁹ See §7.3 on *Ann.* 14.10.3, and §5.2, p. 215 on *Ann.* 6.6. Miller 1973, 85 places the emphasis on the second, rationalizing, explanation. Whitehead 1979, 486 thinks this *seu . . . seu* "is probably a genuine balance." Fulkerson 2013, 157–8 connects Nero's reaction with feelings of remorse about killing his mother.

¹¹⁰ The signs in Suetonius (*Ner. 19.1*: the hem of his garment gets caught and he experiences temporary blindness) are more explicitly concerned with warning Nero not to leave Rome (in that both blindness and being trapped in place prevent departure), whereas the trembling that Tacitus reports suggests a more generalized fear in the presence of the divine.

reader by heaping up omens and prodigious occurrences around the *princeps*. Placing this incident before the fire thus links Nero's past crimes and continuing impiety with a future disaster.

The fire narrative itself is perhaps the climax of Tacitus' narrative of cultic memory in the *Annals*. It not only shows the wrath of the gods and Nero's ignorance of Rome's religious traditions and concomitant incompetence in responding to that wrath, but it also represents a further destruction of Roman cultural memory, as important cult sites and the memories attached to them are lost. The fire, described as more violent than any Rome has ever suffered (15.38.1), can be seen as a prodigious occurrence in its own right according to Roman tradition.¹¹¹ Tacitus' account of the fire follows immediately after his description of Tigellinus' depraved party for Nero (15.38.1 *sequitur clades*), at which Nero celebrates "marriage" with Pythagoras, implying a causal relationship between the two.¹¹² Just as Tacitus followed observations on Nero's transgressive desire to take the sacred crowns at the Greek games with his report of the collapse of a theater and Nero's fright before Vesta, suggesting the gods' displeasure at his interest in games, so the juxtaposition of Tigellinus' party and the perverted marriage rituals with the fire suggest divine anger at his excesses. Again, as with the theater's collapse, Tacitus does not say that anyone believed the fire to be a prodigy, suggesting the widespread ignorance of Nero's transgressions and their potential consequences. Similarly, the close proximity of the reports of the collapsed theater, Vesta's displeasure, and the fire mimics the reporting of prodigies grouped together in lists found in Livy; even if none of the three is definitively stated to be a mark of divine anger, their juxtaposition amplifies their impact. If the fire is meant to be read as prodigious, Tacitus' description of it suggests that the divine wrath it signifies is widespread and inescapable, like the flames themselves (15.38.5), and that Rome's citizens will be as incapable of stopping it as they are of stopping the spread of the flames (15.38.7).

The true physical, cultural, and cultic loss from the fire becomes apparent in Tacitus' catalog of destroyed buildings, among them many temples:

Domuum et insularum et templorum quae amissa sunt numerum inire haud promptum fuerit: sed vetustissima religione, quod Servius Tullius Lunae et magna ara fanumque quae praesenti Herculi Arcas Evander sacraverat, aedesque Statoris Iovis vota Romulo Numaeque regia et delubrum Vestae cum Penatibus populi Romani exusta; iam opes tot victoriis quaesitae et Graecarum artium decora, exim monumenta ingeniorum antiqua et incorrupta, <ut> quamvis in

¹¹¹ For fires interpreted as prodigies, see Krauss 1930, 91–2.

¹¹² Allen et al. 1962, 103. Other examples of "causal *sequor*" include *Ann.* 1.76.1, 6.17.3, 14.22.4, 15.47.2. Woodman 1992, 176 n. 7, 177 has seen foreshadowing of the fire in Tacitus' language in 15.36–7. A second outbreak of the fire several days afterwards is described as beginning on Tigellinus' estate (15.40.2).

tanta resurgentis urbis pulchritudine multa seniores meminerint quae reparari nequibant. (*Ann.* 15.41.1)

(It would be no easy matter to determine the number of homes, apartment blocks, and temples which were lost, but the following temples of most ancient sanctity were burned: the one which Servius Tullius had consecrated to Luna; the altar and shrine which Arcadian Evander had consecrated to Present Hercules; the temple of Jupiter the Stayer of Flight vowed by Romulus; Numa's Palace; and the shrine of Vesta with the Penates of the Roman people; furthermore, riches and the glories of the Greek arts sought in so many victories; and additionally, ancient and incorruptible monuments of intellects—such that despite being surrounded by such beauty of the city as it sprung up again, older men remember many things which could not be rebuilt.)

These temples are important *lieux de mémoire* for Roman cultic memory: Tacitus emphasizes their antiquity and the *religio* (appropriate feeling of religious awe) with which they were founded and, in noting the individuals who vowed them, highlights the acts of worship that their construction constitutes (*sacraverat; vota*).¹¹³ The many dedications that perished inside the temples are also physical reminders of cult acts performed by Romans in the past. In the destruction of these sites, therefore, the long tradition of Roman piety that they represent is also destroyed, depriving Neronian Rome of a tangible connection with the city's cultic memory. But it is not only the shrines themselves, but the memories embodied there, that suffer. The list of temples Tacitus mentions has been chosen very carefully. All are sites dating from Rome's earliest years which are also discussed by Livy, who gives them important associations with Rome's eternal dominion; these Livian resonances are reinforced by allusions to Livy immediately before and after the passage.¹¹⁴ By setting up a dialogue with his historiographical predecessor, Tacitus puts this loss of cultic memory in a literary context; the existence of the temples whose foundation stories Livy preserves is threatened by this Neronian disaster. In his observation that "incorruptible monuments" were also destroyed in the fire, Tacitus almost certainly refers to works of history; the impieties of the Neronian age, reflected in the fire, thus threaten the survival not only of the cult sites themselves, but also of the literature that can help contextualize those monuments for future generations.¹¹⁵ With both the "functional" memory of temples (the sites of regularly repeated rituals that play a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of Roman cultic memory) and the "stored" memory of the works of history (which tell Neronian Romans about the ancient acts of worship by Romans of the Regal Period that made that continuity possible) destroyed by the flames, there seems little possibility of rebuilding Rome's

¹¹³ Cf. Rüpke 2011, 99: "Temple foundations rank highly in the list of those historical events that were the most precisely retained in Rome's collective memory."

¹¹⁴ Shannon 2012, 752.

¹¹⁵ Shannon 2012, 752–3.

relationship with the gods at these sites.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the old men of Tacitus' own day who can remember what was there before the post-fire reconstruction are the only remaining repository of knowledge about these ancient temples, and they recognize that the beauty of the reconstructed city cannot compare to the venerability of what was lost.¹¹⁷ Only their memories, preserved by Tacitus, provide any connection with Rome's cultic past; temples and literary *monumenta* have proved not to be so "incorruptible" after all, and even Tacitus can preserve only a tenuous link with ancient religiosity.

Nero's response to this cataclysmic destruction of cultic memory also suggests that in the religious climate of the Julio-Claudian principate, recovery will be difficult if not impossible. His reaction to the fire does show an attempt to set things right:

mox petita dis piacula aditque Sibyllae libri, ex quibus supplicatum Vulcano et Cereri Proserpinaeque ac propitiata Iuno per matronas, primum in Capitolio, deinde apud proximum mare, unde hausta aqua templum et simulacrum deae perspersum est; et sellisternia ac pervigilia celebrare feminae quibus mariti erant. sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia quin iussum incendium crederetur. (*Ann.* 15.44.1–2)

(Next, rites of expiation for the gods were sought and the Sibylline books consulted. In accordance with them, a supplication was performed to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina, and Juno was propitiated by the matrons, at first on the Capitoline but then at the nearest sea; with water drawn from it they sprinkled the temple and the goddess's statue. And the women who had husbands celebrated *sellisternia* and vigils. But neither human effort nor the *princeps'* generosity or appeasements of the gods dispelled the stigma of the belief that the fire had been ordered.)

Following the advice of the books, the Romans propitiate the appropriate gods: Vulcan the god of fire, and three goddesses who had temples near where the fire broke out.¹¹⁸ Religious correctness is apparently preserved, even in Tacitus' vocabulary: *supplico*, *matrona*, *perspergo*, *sellisternium*, and *propitio* are all rare or archaic words specifically connected to ritual.¹¹⁹ The consultation of the Sibylline books marks Nero out as more respectful of ritual procedure than Tiberius, who refused to allow them to be consulted in a situation where it would have been traditional to do so, and Claudius, who maintained his obliviousness to the prodigies that began to appear during his

¹¹⁶ Shannon 2012, 755–6. On functional vs. stored memory (*Funktionsgedächtnis* and *Speichergedächtnis*), see A. Assmann 1999, 130–45.

¹¹⁷ Koestermann 1968, 245. The *seniores* are almost certainly old men from Tacitus' era who had been alive in AD 64 and therefore would have experienced Rome both before and after the fire (Shannon 2012, 754 n. 22).

¹¹⁸ Koestermann 1968, 252; Shannon 2012, 756.

¹¹⁹ Miller 1973, 96. *Propitio* occurs only once elsewhere in Tacitus (*Dial.* 9.5), and the other terms are *hapax legomena*.

reign.¹²⁰ To some extent, then, knowledge of the prodigy-expiation system has persisted despite the long history of neglect dating from early in Tiberius' principate. Consulting the books also suggests that Nero, or his subjects, understand the fire as a mark of divine displeasure that needs expiation, and shows a level of awareness that is perhaps surprising given his irreligious conduct throughout his reign; the Nero who allows consultation of the Sibylline books has more in common with the Nero who quakes in Vesta's temple than with the impious matricide. But all this religious correctness is suddenly and swiftly undercut by the intimation that Nero set the fire himself (15.44.2).¹²¹ After his display of ritually correct Roman piety fails to convince the people of his innocence, Nero uses the Christians as scapegoats to silence the rumors of his responsibility for the fire, an element lacking in the parallel accounts of Dio and Suetonius.¹²² Tacitus acknowledges that the Christians present a religious threat: their beliefs are labelled a "deadly superstition" (15.44.3 *exitiabilis superstitio*), one among the many species of religious sickness afflicting Neronian Rome, "where everything heinous or shameful from everywhere flows together and is celebrated" (15.44.3 *per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocita aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque*). Yet the long decline of cultic memory for which the principate is responsible may be why the city is a breeding ground perfect for such "deadly superstitions." Although the violent extermination of foreign religious cults had a long history, it is hypocritical for the impious Nero to attack other religious offenders, just as it was for Tiberius and Claudius to expel Jews, Isis-worshippers, and astrologers.¹²³ The people of Rome feel uneasy about such a naked display of power: "Pity arose even towards people who were guilty and deserving of the most uncommon exemplary punishments, inasmuch as they were being made away with not for the public good, but for the savagery of one man" (15.44.5 *unde quamquam adversus sontes et novissima exempla meritis miseratio oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publica, sed in saevitiam unius absumerentur*). Nero performs a traditional punishment, but not for the traditional reasons. So even at his most punctilious, Nero fails to convince his subjects of his commitment to the principles of cultic memory, insofar as they themselves are still able to understand them.

Even if Nero's expiatory rituals show awareness of religious correctness, it is incomplete, for he goes on to commit sacrilege in his effort to rebuild Rome after the fire. As he ransacks Italy and the provinces for funds,

¹²⁰ See §1.1 and §6.5. ¹²¹ Davies 2004, 200.

¹²² Sordi 1999, 108. The bibliography on this passage, the so-called "Testimonium Taciteum," is vast and contentious; see recently Shaw 2015. See also Shannon-Henderson (forthcoming).

¹²³ Momigliano 1987, 196–7; Beard et al. 1998, i.230–1; Baudy 2006, 105–9. On Tiberius' and Claudius' expulsions of "foreign" religious elements, see §1.5, pp. 54–5, and §6.5, p. 272.

inque eam praedam etiam dii cessere, spoliatis in urbe templis egestoque auro, quod triumphis, quod votis omnis populi Romani aetas prospere aut in metu sacrauerat. enimvero per Asiam atque Achaïam non dona tantum, sed simulacra numinum abripiébantur, missis in eas provincias Acrato et Secundo Carrinate.

(Ann. 15.45.1–2)

(even the gods gave way to that pillaging as the temples in the city were despoiled and a pile was made of the gold which every era of the Roman people had dedicated in triumphs and vows, in times of prosperity or fear. And what is more, throughout Asia and Achaea, not only gifts, but even statues of the divinities were stolen when Acratus and Secundus Carrinas were sent to those provinces.)

Temples in Rome itself are robbed of their dedications, representing a long history of Romans striving to maintain a correct relationship with their gods as they set forth on the campaigns that increased Rome's empire or prayed for their help in bad times. This connection between the gods and historic Roman achievements recalls the Livian temple list.¹²⁴ Whether or not he set the fire, Nero, ignorant of both the ritual significance and commemorative function of the temples and dedications he ransacks, now continues the fire's work to obliterate even those commemorative dedications it did not destroy. He is like an army attacking his own city and his own gods, who in military language yield like a defeated nation to his quest for war booty.¹²⁵ In despoiling (*spoliatis*) Rome's temples of the spoils won in foreign campaigns, he is plundering plunder, not only removing but effectively cancelling out the reminders of past pious conquest.¹²⁶ Theft of actual cult statues from Greek temples is even more serious: cult statues were so closely related to the deities they represented that it was not always possible to distinguish between the two, and mishandling a god's statue constituted a serious offense against the deity.¹²⁷ While Greek art plundered during Roman wars of expansion and then dedicated in temples in Rome is elsewhere seen as a positive contribution to Rome's glory, as indeed Tacitus himself both here and in the temple list suggests (cf. 15.41.1 *Graecarum artium decora*),¹²⁸ Nero's plundered statues are not acquired in the proper way (through a glorious and successful military campaign), but are stolen by a freedman and a dilettante philosopher. More significantly, stealing a cult statue is a very different matter from plundering other artworks, and it is always represented negatively in the sources.¹²⁹ Tacitus draws a sharp

¹²⁴ Cf. Ann. 15.41.1 *quod... sacrauerat; opes tot victoriis quaesitae*.

¹²⁵ See OLD s.v. *cedere* 13, 15; OLD s.v. *praeda* 1; Keitel 1984, 308; Martin and Woodman 1989, 226–7.

¹²⁶ *Spoliare* elsewhere can describe a Roman power removing objects from foreign temples: Sall. Cat. 11.6; Cic. Div. Caec. 11.

¹²⁷ Shannon 2012, 759–60 n. 44.

¹²⁸ Cf. Cic. Verr. 2.4.78 on the statue of Diana from Segesta (with Vasaly 1993, 118 and Shannon 2012, 760 n. 45), and see Miles 2008, 44–5.

¹²⁹ See Miles 2008, 73–95; Shannon 2012, 760 n. 46.

distinction here between *dona* and *simulacra*, suggesting he also sees a difference between objects dedicated to gods and objects meant to represent gods, even if Nero does not; the emperor's apparent religious correctness at 15.44 is undermined, suggesting that he only reveres cult statues when they are located in Rome.

Tacitus explicitly states that Nero's actions here are religiously problematic: "Seneca is said to have begged for retirement to the faraway countryside, so that he could keep away from himself the malice at the sacrilege" (*Ann.* 15.45.2 *ferebatur Seneca, quo invidiam sacrilegii a semet averteret, longinqui ruris secessum oravisse*). This plundering of temples is the only action that Tacitus ever explicitly describes as *sacrilegium*, a label parallel accounts do not use here.¹³⁰ The popular *invidia* that Seneca seeks to avoid suggests that the Roman people are sufficiently religiously aware to recognize and label Nero's behavior as sacrilege, yet their evident discontent fails once again to make any impact, just as with popular ridicule of Claudius' expiations of incest (12.8.1). Even Seneca, one of Nero's closest advisors, does not actually advise Nero not to commit sacrilege, but merely distances himself from it. This is the point to which Roman religion has come: the rhetorical culture of the principate, characterized by Imperial cult and religious flattery of the emperor, is also a culture of looking the other way when sacrilege is committed, of complaining without effect, of directing criticism at someone who is not the *princeps*, of moving oneself out of the blast zone rather than stopping the detonation from occurring.

The gods are more effective than the people at expressing their displeasure at Nero's sacrilegious behavior in a string of prodigies that suggest not only a divine reaction to his impieties in the past, but also a warning of consequences to come.¹³¹

Fine anni vulgantur prodigia imminentium malorum nuntia: vis fulgurum non alias crebrior et sidus cometes, sanguine inlustri semper Neroni expiatum; bicipites hominum aliorumve animalium partus abiecti in publicum aut in sacrificiis, quibus gravidas hostias immolare mos est, reperti. et in agro Placentino viam propter natus vitulus cui caput in crure esset; secutaque haruspicum interpretatio, parari rerum humanarum aliud caput, sed non fore validum neque occultum, quia in utero repressum aut iter iuxta editum sit. (*Ann.* 15.47)

(At the end of the year, prodigies were reported that announced imminent troubles: a violent discharge of lightning bolts more frequent than ever before; a comet always expiated by Nero with noble blood; two-headed births of humans or other animals cast out in public or discovered in sacrifices where the custom is to offer pregnant victims. And in the territory of Placentia a calf was born by the

¹³⁰ See also *Agr.* 6.5, and contrast *Suet. Ner.* 32.4 and *Dio* 63.11.3. See also Shannon 2012, 760 n. 47. On the meanings of *sacrilegium*, see Pfaff 1920.

¹³¹ Cf. Davies 2004, 156 n. 36, and 200.

side of the road which people said had its head on its leg; and there followed an interpretation of the haruspices, who said that another head of human affairs was in preparation, but that it would be neither strong nor hidden, because it had been prevented from developing in the womb and was born by the side of the road.)

Apart from the deformed cow, everything in this prodigy list has an antecedent in an earlier prodigy list from the reign of Nero or Claudius, suggesting that if prodigies are messages indicating divine displeasure, the gods are having to repeat themselves as their communiqués go unheard by the Roman people. The comet and lightning bolts recall the combination of portents that was erroneously thought to foretell the demise of Nero and the rise of Rubellius Plautus, with Tacitus even echoing his own earlier language with the unusual words *sidus cometes* and *fulgur* (14.22.1–2).¹³² Yet whereas those who used that comet and thunderbolt to predict that Nero would fall and Rubellius Plautus take his place were deceived of their hopes, this time Tacitus explicitly tells us that the comet and lightning are *prodigia imminantium malorum*—predicting perhaps evils for Nero (i.e. a real change of ruler this time), but certainly more bad times for the Roman state. Crucially, no one in Rome is able to expiate these prodigies properly. Nero should be expiating the appearance of a comet by sacrificing animals, not his political rivals, to the gods. Similarly, the Roman people fail to follow the correct procedure after the discovery of deformed human fetuses, traditionally thought to indicate a rupture of the *pax deorum*: their disposal of them is described in the language not of proper expiation, but of child exposure (*abicere, in publicum*).¹³³ The deformed animal births, commonly regarded as prodigious in Roman religion,¹³⁴ are not expiated at all. And when the haruspices are consulted about the deformed calf, it is merely for the purposes of explanation, rather than expiation; despite Claudius' revival of the college, and even of Nero's previous consultation of them to perform the traditional expiation for lightning strikes, there is no suggestion that these religious experts can actually fix the problem the prodigies indicate. Even their explanation does not appear to carry much weight. The haruspices turn out to be correct about the calf's significance, but the conspirators ignore their proclamation that their coup is doomed.¹³⁵ So Nero's subjects, while they may have recognized that robbing temples is an act of sacrilege, are no more aware than their *princeps* of what should be done to assuage divine anger; religious experts who should be heeded as authorities on averting the gods' anger are minimally helpful, and

¹³² *Sidus cometes* is *hapax legomenon* in Tacitus; he elsewhere uses *fulgur* only at *Hist.* 1.18.1.

¹³³ Krauss 1930, 129–30. For the prescribed rituals for expiating a monstrous deformed child, see Livy 27.37.5–6, 31.12.6–8; Briscoe 1973, 89; MacBain 1982, 127–35; Garland 1995, 68–71. See Shannon 2012, 761 on *abicere, in publicum*.

¹³⁴ Krauss 1930, 119, 120–9.

¹³⁵ Davies 2004, 157. *Caput* imagery often denotes leadership (Ash 1997, 196–7).

even what expertise they do offer is ignored. Rome has entered a full-blown crisis of religious memory.

7.7 IMPIETY AND MISINTERPRETATION IN THE PISONIAN CONSPIRACY

Tacitus' narrative of the Pisonian conspiracy further underlines the pervasiveness of the decline in Roman religious memory: the conspirators are evidently the best hope to challenge Nero's principate, but they not only fail to remove him from power, but are as ignorant of matters of cult and ritual as Nero is. Tacitus' account of the episode exposes the motivations of individuals acting either irreligiously, or correctly but for the wrong reasons. The conspirators' failure to improve Rome's culture of cultic memory shows that no real solution exists to the problems that Tacitus has been chronicling since the beginning of the *Annals*.

Piso in particular, although he occasionally seems to be a voice of reason in upholding religious norms, ultimately shows himself to be nearly as clueless as Nero as to what constitutes correct behavior. He refuses to kill Nero while the latter is a guest in his villa at Baiae, "giving as his reason the malice if the sanctities of the table and the gods of hospitality were bloodied by the slaughter of a *princeps*, however bad he was" (*Ann.* 15.52.1 *invidiam praetendens, si sacra mensae diique hospitales caede qualiscumque principis cruentarentur*). The demands of the *di hospitales* were to be taken seriously; for instance, a proposal to kill even Hannibal, Rome's most hated enemy, during a feast, met with the opposition of Livy's Pacuvius Calavius.¹³⁶ The phrase *sacra mensae* recalls Tacitus' indignant description of Britannicus' murder by Nero at the dinner table (13.17.3); the conspirators who suggest such a murder are therefore as impious as Nero himself.¹³⁷ But Piso refuses to kill Nero not for the religious reasons he alleges (*praetendens*), but merely because he fears a rival will take power instead of himself¹³⁸ and because he recognizes that murdering Nero in this way will elicit popular sympathy (15.52.2). Piso uses religious concern as a veil for true motivations and intentions, just like Nero (cf. 13.5.2 *specie pietatis*, 14.3.3 *ostentandae pietati*); this shows how false religiosity has permeated court life.

The conspirators' choice of time and place for the attempt on Nero's life also shows a profound lack of awareness of ritual norms that rivals Nero's.

¹³⁶ Livy 23.9.3–5; see Levene 2010, 358 on the episode. Cf. Livy 39.51.12, with Bolchazy 1977, 26; Bolchazy 1978, 56.

¹³⁷ Cf. Lennon 2015, 727. On the significance of the *sacra mensae*, see §7.2, pp. 287–8.

¹³⁸ Koestermann 1968, 276.

They decide to kill him in the Circus during a day of games that form part of the Cerealia: although Piso refused to kill Nero at his table, he apparently has no problem with committing murder during a religious festival.¹³⁹ Piso is to hide in the goddess' very temple (*Ann.* 15.53.3) while the murder is committed. Scaevinus' choice of murder weapon is even more problematic: "He had stolen a dagger from the temple of Salus in Etruria, or, as others have related, from the temple of Fortuna in the town of Ferentinum, and was carrying it around as though it had been sanctified for a great deed" (15.53.2 *pugionem templo Salutis in Etruria sive, ut alii tradidere, Fortunae Ferentino in oppido detraxerat gestabatque velut magno operi sacrum*).¹⁴⁰ He asserts that the dagger will actually bring divine support for the murder; the conspirators mistakenly feel that by involving Ceres and Salus or Fortuna, they will convince the gods to condone their assassination. Since the dagger was probably originally placed in the shrine as a votive offering,¹⁴¹ this makes Scaevinus a temple-robber no better than Nero himself. And when he is caught and questioned, Scaevinus shamelessly pretends religious veneration to cover up his real reason for having the dagger, saying that "it had for a long time been venerated with the religious scruple of his ancestors, and had been stolen by his freedman's deceit" (15.55.2 *olim religione patria cultum ac fraude liberti subreptum*).¹⁴² If true, that might have been a pious indicator that someone in Rome followed ancient religious traditions by carefully preserving an object sacred to a goddess with whom he had a familial connection. But Scaevinus is only paying lip service to that ideal, since he actually is keeping the dagger for a much less innocent purpose. Furthermore, Scaevinus' alleged devotion to the goddess is ultimately futile, since the dagger, given to Scaevinus' freedman Milichus for sharpening (15.54.1) and taken by him to Nero as proof of the plot against his life (15.55.1), plays a key role in the conspiracy's failure.¹⁴³ The fact that Tacitus gives two possibilities for the dagger's divine owner which he discovered in his sources, perhaps deriving from oral traditions about the conspiracy, may suggest that Salus or Fortuna, or both, are convenient inventions.¹⁴⁴ If either

¹³⁹ On the Cerealia, see Koestermann 1968, 278; Scullard 1981, 101. Committing acts of violence on days of *feriae* was a religious offense (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.15.21; cf. Michels 1967, 70–1).

¹⁴⁰ The MS's *in Etruria* has been suspected as a gloss on the grounds that it is more general than Tacitus' typical geographical precision (Furneaux 1907, 388); Koestermann 1968, 279 suggests Tacitus wished to specify that this was not the well-known temple of Salus located on the Quirinal Hill in Rome. Woodman 2004, 330 retains *in Etruria*. The name of the town has also been suspected; the manuscript transmits *Frentano*, defended by Wiseman 1967 as a periphrasis for Histonium (*BAGRW* 42 4H), but most assume that the town mentioned should also be in Etruria, and opt for Ferentinum (*BAGRW* 42 C4), not to be confused with the town of the same name in Latium (*BAGRW* 44 D2). See Furneaux 1907, 388; Koestermann 1968, 279; Miller 1973, 106; Winkler 1995, 59 n. 267. Scaevinus is not otherwise known (Miller 1973, 102), so there is no independent evidence of his family's geographical origin.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Koestermann 1968, 280.

¹⁴² Cf. Pagan 2004, 85.

¹⁴³ Davies 2004, 157 n. 42.

¹⁴⁴ Clark 2007, 268–9.

Scaevinus or Tacitus' sources are making these goddesses up, that only underlines the fact that it is only a veneer of religiosity which the dagger offers to the conspirators.

Yet the Senate is on no more solid ground than the conspirators when they attempt to claim divine aid in the exposure of the conspiracy. After the failure, revelation, and punishment of the conspiracy, senatorial flattery manifests itself again:

Tum [decreta] dona et grates deis decernuntur, propriusque honos Soli, cum est vetus aedes apud circum, in quo facinus parabatur, qui occulta coniurationis <suo> numine retexisset; utque circensium Cerialium ludicrum pluribus equorum cursibus celebraretur mensisque Aprilis Neronis cognomentum acciperet; templum Saluti exstrueretur eius loco, ex quo Scaevinus ferrum prompserat. ipse eum pugionem apud Capitolium sacrauit inscripsitque Iovi Vindici, <quod> in praesens haud animadversum post arma Iulii Vindicis ad auspicium et praesagium futurae ultionis trahebatur. (*Ann.* 15.74.1–2)

(Then gifts and thanks were decreed for the gods, and the Sun received particular honor since there is an ancient temple near the Circus in which the crime was being prepared, and he (they said) had revealed the conspiracy's secrets by his divinity. And it was decreed that the circus games of the Cerealia should be celebrated with more horse races, and that the month of April should receive the title "Neronian," and that a temple of his Salus should be constructed on the site from which Scaevinus had produced the dagger. Nero himself dedicated that dagger on the Capitoline and inscribed it for Jupiter Vindex; this was not noticed at present, but after the coup of Julius Vindex it was interpreted as a portent and predictor of vengeance to come.)

The Senate's decrees attempt to inscribe Nero's safety into Roman cultic memory for the future. The temple of ancient god Sol in the Circus Maximus will presumably be the recipient of dedications commemorating Nero's escape from harm, on display for all future visitors to the temple;¹⁴⁵ the close connection between the emperor's personal safety and an ancient cult will be memorialized. Yet the senators' attempt to capitalize on Sol's associations with light, revelation, and protection¹⁴⁶ is misplaced, since that god had less to do with the conspiracy's revelation than, perhaps, Fortuna or Salus of the dagger. The senators' proposal to alter the name of the month of April, when the festival took place,¹⁴⁷ and to add additional days of racing, is an attempt to reappropriate the Cerealia and link the games with Nero, ensuring that his

¹⁴⁵ On the temple, cf. Tert. *De spect.* 8.1 and see Halsberghe 1972, 32–3; Humphrey 1986, 92–4; Richardson 1992, 364–5; Matern 2002, 24–6; Hijmans 2010, 387. The sun god's portrayal as charioteer makes Sol a particularly appropriate deity for Nero with his interest in racing (Champlin 2003, 119–20).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Sol's importance in Augustan ideology (Halsberghe 1972, 30; Humphrey 1986, 96, 269–71).

¹⁴⁷ Ovid *Fast.* 4.393 ff.

escape from danger is inscribed in the Roman calendar to be remembered by all future Romans who celebrate the revised festival. The line blurs between conspirators and senators, both guilty of bending the same goddess's festival to their own purposes. The new temple for Salus is also an attempt to reappropriate the conspirators' goddess: they invoked Salus to imply that killing Nero would contribute to the state's well-being by removing a bad emperor, while the Senate's decree implies that it is quashing that conspiracy that truly achieved this goal.¹⁴⁸ Certainly stealing the dagger from Salus' temple did not bring *salus* or *fortuna* to the conspiracy, a fact the Senate seeks to commemorate by placing the new temple of Salus on the site of Scaevinus' house.¹⁴⁹ But given that the goddess did not in the end help the conspirators, she could similarly turn on Nero, a fact of which he seems ignorant.¹⁵⁰ And Nero's dedication of the weapon to Jupiter Vindex is similarly short-sighted: putting Salus/Fortuna's dagger in the hands of an Avenger would later find deeper meaning when viewed through the lens of Vindex's revolt. This interpretation (*trahebatur*)¹⁵¹ was not, of course, available to Nero himself. Although Nero was foolish to think the dagger would bring *salus* to him any more than the conspirators, the Vindex connection, as Davies notes, "may imply that the dagger's divine patronage . . . did have some potency" even if the conspirators themselves did not benefit from it.¹⁵² Both Nero and the conspirators, then, are equally wrong to assume that the gods are on their side. It is also unclear whom, if anyone, divine vengeance *is* working to protect; it is not necessarily the Roman people who benefit, for the idea of vengeance prefigures the revenge that characterizes the activity of the four contenders for the principate in AD 69, which will bring suffering to the whole empire.¹⁵³ Unaware of this complex nexus of reversal and revenge, Nero blithely makes a dedication that will later seem to presage his own downfall.

But the senators' flattery of Nero does not stop with the attempt to inscribe his survival of the Pisonian Conspiracy into Rome's ritual calendar and traditional cult buildings:

reperio in commentariis senatus Cerialem Anicium consulem designatum pro sententia dixisse ut templum divo Neroni quam maturrime publica pecunia poneretur. quod quidem ille decernebat tamquam mortale fastigium egresso et

¹⁴⁸ Winkler 1995, 60.

¹⁴⁹ Here I follow the interpretation of Woodman 2005, 328 (*pace* Winkler 1995, 59–60, who assumes the new temple of Salus was located not in Rome but in Ferentinum, on the site from which Scaevinus stole the dagger).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Davies 2004, 157 n. 42.

¹⁵¹ *OLD* s.v. *traho* 20b, "to assign, ascribe (to a meaning); take (in a particular way)." Cf. Livy 44.37.7, Tac. *Ann.* 14.32.1.

¹⁵² Davies 2004, 157 n. 42.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Hist.* 1.3.2 *ultionem*, on which see §0.2, pp. 16–17. Woodman 1993, 126–7 has seen a similar connection between Jupiter Vindex and Jupiter Liberator (*Ann.* 15.60.4; see §7.9, p. 347).

venerationem hominum merito, <sed ipse prohibuit, ne interpretatione> quorundam ad omen [dolum] sui exitus verteretur: nam deum honor principi non ante habetur, quam agere inter homines desierit. (*Ann.* 15.74.3)

(I find in the Senate's records that Cerialis Anicius, the consul-elect, spoke on behalf of a proposal to build a temple to *divus Nero* as quickly as possible, financed out of public funds. He had made the proposal for one who, as he said, had gone beyond mortal eminence and had earned men's veneration. But Nero himself forbade it, lest according to the interpretation of certain people it should become an omen of his departure; for the honor of the gods is not held by a *princeps* before he has ceased to live among humans.)

Tacitus has already told of another emperor, Tiberius, being offered temples in the provinces during his own lifetime (4.15.3, 4.37.1); what is different now is that Anicius' proposal would make Nero a god of the Roman state cult before his death. The temple would be erected presumably at Rome and paid for out of public funds (*publica pecunia*), rather than financed by and sited among provincials, like Tiberius' temple in Asia and the one he rejects in Spain. *Deum honor*, which Tacitus notes may only be granted to emperors once they have died, also suggests state cult; the phrase recalls the "honors of the gods," (1.10.6 *deum honoribus*) that the critics of Augustus' deification argued were being diminished by Imperial cult. It is true that in the extant *Annals*, Tacitus has chosen to minimize emperors being offered cult buildings or personnel during their lifetimes, although external evidence shows that all of the previous Julio-Claudian emperors did receive offers of such honors during their lifetimes.¹⁵⁴ Tacitus' decision to omit such things from his account makes Anicius' proposal of *deum honor* for Nero all the more glaring: rather than being part of a package of cultic commemoration that is traditionally offered to emperors who refuse the offer with equal regularity, the worship of Nero is made to look more striking, a stand-alone instance of state cult of an emperor during his lifetime.¹⁵⁵ This underlines Tacitus' point about senatorial flattery reaching a peak under Nero: this temple can be seen as the apex of a steadily climbing curve, an extreme proposal with its origins in the long, slow increase of cultic and cult-like honors for the emperors and their families that has been too little contested in the previous principates chronicled in the *Annals*. We can think again of Tiberius' critics (4.38.4–5), whose evisceration of Tiberius was predicated on the assumptions that *principes* are fundamentally closer to the divine end of the spectrum than not, and that cultic memory is in fact the best form of memory and greatly to be desired by any emperor. While Anicius' proposal

¹⁵⁴ See Gradel 2002, 142–4 and evidence there cited.

¹⁵⁵ The picture, of course, may have been different depending upon how Tacitus depicted Caligula's principate; see §6.1.

is portrayed by Tacitus as more extreme, the fact that he makes it at all is an outgrowth of these same assumptions. His proposal, therefore, clearly illustrates the logical conclusion to which the problems of the *Annals* have been tending: when cultic commemoration has become so normalized, such excessive proposals are the result.

Even if Nero is the first *princeps* in the extant *Annals* to refuse state cult, however, he is not the first to refuse a temple. The difference between Nero's and Tiberius' reasoning is a telling illustration of how cultic memory in Rome has suffered over the course of the Julio-Claudian principates. Nero's reason for refusal suggests he is overly fearful, and overly literal, when it comes to cult. He thinks, Tacitus says, that such a temple would be an omen of his death; the historian then adds his own explanatory gloss in the final sentence (*nam*). Since someone has proposed "the honor of the gods", and since (as Tacitus notes) an emperor is only supposed to receive that after he is dead, Nero's logic goes, if he accepts the temple, there are those who will say he will probably die soon. This is a particularly egregious illustration of Nero's problems with interpreting signs. For someone who has received and ignored several omens suggesting his demise to seize upon something that is not ominous at all and refer to it as an omen shows that he has failed to recognize what signs deserve concern. This superstitious fear that forms Nero's only basis for refusal is far less nuanced than Tiberius' consideration of the relationship between cultic commemoration and posthumous reputation. Nero is concerned with what people will say about him in the future only to the extent that he fears some people (*quorundam*) will want to see it as a prediction of his death. Tiberius seemed almost certain that those who disliked him would turn the Spanish temple into a site of abuse and warp the positive memory of him that it sought to preserve, little realizing that being worshipped as a god would probably have improved rather than hindered his chances of being remembered positively, especially given the changing attitudes to cultic memory. But Nero does not even consider how people might think about him. He does not refuse the temple because of the bad reputation it would earn him, as deification did for Julius Caesar (on whose murder the Pisonian conspiracy was modelled), or even for Augustus in the mouth of those critics (1.10.6).¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Nero does not consider Augustan precedent at all; he only thinks about his predecessors to the extent that he recognizes that all current *divi* are deceased. So while proposals of cultic flattery for the *princeps* have become more extreme since the beginning of the *Annals*, so has the *princeps*' own misunderstanding of cultic commemoration and its power.

¹⁵⁶ Woodman 1993, 127.

7.8 FORTUNE'S PLAYTHINGS

Immediately after his narrative of the end of the Pisonian conspiracy and its reminder of Vindex's rebellion, from which the gods will not save Nero, Tacitus reinforces the sense of divine disapproval by observing that Nero's fortunes are changing: "Then Fortune played a trick on Nero through his own vanity and the promises of Caesellius Bassus, who, Phoenician in origin and disturbed in his mind, interpreted a vision from his nighttime rest as the expectation of a thing that was not in doubt" (*Ann.* 16.1.1 *Inludit dehinc Neroni fortuna per vanitatem ipsius et promissa Caeselli Bassi, qui origine Poenus, mente turbida, nocturnae quietis imaginem ad spem haud dubiae rei traxit*). Nero is the object of *illudere*, not its subject (as in most cases in the Neronian *Annals* where the verb appears),¹⁵⁷ the shift suggests that the tables are going to turn on him. *Fortuna* is portrayed as elusive and fickle, and the suggestion is that Nero is "about to face a sharp *peripeteia*" brought about by his own vanity.¹⁵⁸ That is certainly true, in that the gold in Bassus' dream, upon which much time and effort is squandered, turns out not to exist. But Tacitus' expression may set up grander expectations which will not be realized. *Fortuna* the trickster also strongly recalls the *fortuna* of the *Histories*, a fickle mistress who deserts individual commanders in the civil wars when their Imperial hopes are ended and their deaths are imminent.¹⁵⁹ *Fortuna* in that sense is not working against Nero here, or at least not yet; Nero not only will continue to be emperor for two more years after this incident, but also does not even suffer any real loss as a result of this episode, since it is Bassus and not the emperor who loses either his life or his fortune depending on which version of the story one follows (16.3.2).¹⁶⁰

But the appearance of *fortuna* here could also have something of the *fortuna* of *Ann.* 4.1.1, also appearing at the beginning of a book; there, *fortuna* was strongly linked with the idea that the gods were angry at Rome. At particular issue in this episode is the interpretation of signs, for everything hinges on the wilful misinterpretation of a dream. Nero has ample reason to *want* to believe Bassus' dream: gold was generally connected with divine favor and *fortuna*, and the connection with Dido would connect it to Nero's ancestor Aeneas, making the treasure a potentially powerful propaganda tool.¹⁶¹ But Nero cannot live up to the memory of Aeneas here, for the source for this information is a dream, which must be carefully interpreted according to Roman religious tradition, something neither Nero nor Bassus is equipped to do.

¹⁵⁷ Bartera 2008, 45.

¹⁵⁸ Ash 2015, 278.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Hist.* 2.12.1, 2.47.1, with Ash 2007a, 75. See also Matthews 2011, 116 for a similar take on *fortuna* in Lucan, and 149 for "*fortuna* as an agent of *translatio imperii*."

¹⁶⁰ Ash 2015, 280–1.

¹⁶¹ Braund 1983, 65–6. Murgatroyd 2002, 133 points out that any comparison with Aeneas was probably unfavorable for Nero.

Tacitus hints that Nero should not be so quick to believe Bassus: the man's mental disturbances and Phoenician ancestry should make his dreams an unreliable source, and the formula *trahere ad* + accusative indicates his interpretation of them perhaps goes beyond what is wise.¹⁶² What Tacitus says plays into Nero's decision to believe him anyway is *vanitas*, the same word he used to describe preconceived notions about a sign's meaning that were applied to the lightning supposedly foretelling Rubellius Plautus' Imperial destiny (14.22.2).

This is not a problem unique to Nero, either in this particular episode or in the *Annals* in general. The servile people and Senate are all too ready to believe Bassus' dream, and the episode escalates remarkably quickly as people rush to agree with Nero.¹⁶³ Flattery ensues as orators use the gold to praise Nero at the quinquennial games:

non enim solitas tantum fruges nec confusum metallis aurum gigni, sed nova ubertate provenire terram et obvias opes deferre deos, quaeque alia summa facundia nec minore adulatione servilia fingeant, securi de facilitate credentis. Gliscebant interim luxuria spe inani consumebanturque veteres opes quasi oblatas quas multos per annos prodigeret. quin et inde iam largiebatur; et divitiarum expectatio inter causas paupertatis publicae erat. (*Ann.* 16.2.2–3.1)

(For (they said) it was not just the accustomed crops nor gold mixed up with other metals that was being generated, but the earth was springing up with a new richness and the gods were bringing down wealth that was ready to hand—and other servile things which they fabricated with exquisite eloquence and no less adulation, certain of the gullibility of a person who would believe them. Meanwhile luxury grew from empty hope, and ancient wealth was consumed as if more resources had been offered which could be squandered for many years. Indeed, expenditure was already being made from that source, too; and the expectation of riches was among the causes of public poverty.)

This flattery is couched in terms recalling the mythical golden age.¹⁶⁴ And linking this instance of flattery to the quinquennial games, a celebration Nero concocted himself (16.2.2; cf. 14.20.1), makes the golden age comparison seem all the more like empty flattery: as Pelling notes, “emperor and public are, as so often, playing the same game, they deserve one another; both are fertile ground for such battiness.”¹⁶⁵ Given this deeply ingrained culture of flattery and misinterpretation, it is little wonder that Bassus is so surprised when his dream proves false: “He said his dreams had not been false before, and marveled that he had been deceived then for the first time” (16.3.2 *non falsa*

¹⁶² For Bassus as Phoenician and therefore untrustworthy, see Ash 2015, 278. On *traho*, see §7.6, p. 329, and n. 151.

¹⁶³ *Ann.* 16.2.1. See Ash 2015, 280.

¹⁶⁴ Ash 2015, 280. This is also a common motif in Neronian literature: see Fabre-Serris 1994, 187–9.

¹⁶⁵ Pelling 1997, 206. Cf. Harris 2003, 30; Ash 2015, 280.

antea somnia sua seque tunc primum elusum admirans). Tacitus does not deny that dreams *can* be sent by the gods, but this one was not; in failing to realize this, the credulous Bassus makes the error of misinterpretation that we have seen throughout the *Annals*. *Elusum* here recalls *inlusit* (16.1.1),¹⁶⁶ suggesting that Nero and Bassus are similarly deceived.

This appears irrelevant to these orators, who grandly proclaim that the gold represents divinely guaranteed prosperity. Their rhetoric certainly does nothing to dissuade Nero from squandering ancestral wealth in expectation of the gold to come, and the result is the impoverishment of the community in general; *paupertas publica* presumably refers to money that had to be taken from other sources to make up for the deficit caused by Nero's profligacy. There have been many instances in the *Annals* where people have failed to interpret apparent signs carefully; for example, Germanicus' uncritical use of the rhetoric of divine punishment and favor. But the episode also has much in common with Claudius' clueless claim of the gods' kindness (11.15.2) in a reign that would be marked by prodigies that suggested the opposite (12.43, 12.64). Nero and his subjects' hasty, *vanitas*-motivated acceptance of Bassus' dream as a sure prediction of divine blessings similarly discounts all the many prodigies that have indicated that Nero's reign is not a time of the gods' kindness or favor. The consequence of this misinterpretation is public poverty, the opposite of what Nero and everyone else assumed would happen; a turn of the tables that constitutes an appropriate punishment, we might think, to be meted out by fickle *fortuna*.

As *fortuna* deserts Nero, Tacitus simultaneously hints that the supernatural is protecting someone else: in an atmosphere of punishment for any who avoided Nero's performances, "they say that Vespasian was criticized by the freedman Phoebeus for having gone to sleep, and was scarcely protected by the prayers of more eminent people, but soon fled imminent destruction thanks to a greater fate" (*Ann.* 16.5.3 *ferebantque Vespasianum, tamquam somno coniveret, a Phoebo liberto increpitum aegreque meliorum precibus obtectum, mox imminentem perniciem maiore fato effugisse*). Tacitus does not say whether the intervention of these *maiores*, cast as "prayers" to a godlike Nero, or whether *fatum* is more responsible for Vespasian's narrow escape, but, given how many people in Neronian Rome are condemned to death or exile, or commit suicide after being accused, it does seem plausible that Vespasian needed supernatural assistance to escape with his life, a damning commentary on Nero's irreligious court. As *fortuna* turns away from the last of the Julio-Claudian line, *fatum* marks out someone else for greatness.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Bartera 2008, 78.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Bartera 2008, 101. See also *Agr.* 13.3 (with Woodman 2014, 163).

At the end of these games, *fors*, much like the fickle *fortuna* deserting Nero, claims another victim in Poppaea: she dies of a kick to the stomach¹⁶⁸ given by Nero in what Tacitus describes as “a chance rage of her husband” (*Ann.* 16.6.1 *fortuita mariti iracundia*).¹⁶⁹ The nature of her funeral, however, shows the *princeps* attempting to commemorate her in a way that asserts his marital devotion and her excellence:

corpus non igni abolitum, ut Romanus mos, sed regum externorum consuetudine differtum odoribus conditur tumuloque Iuliorum infertur. ductae tamen publicae exequiae laudavitque ipse apud rostra formam eius et quod divinae infantis parens fuisset aliaque fortunae munera pro virtutibus. (16.6.2)

(Her body was not burned with fire, as is the Roman custom, but according to the practice of foreign kings was stuffed full of herbs, preserved, and carried into the tumulus of the Iulii. Nevertheless a public funeral was held, and at the rostra the emperor himself praised her beauty and the fact that she had been the mother of a divine infant, and other gifts of fortune in place of virtues.)

Nero is fixated on, and wishes Poppaea to be remembered for, her physical beauty, and his decision to embalm her body to prevent its decay is evidence not only of his “obsession” with his wife’s looks,¹⁷⁰ but also of his disregard for Roman cultural memory, because he abandons tradition (*Romanus mos*) to imitate the grandiose burial customs of the Egyptian kings.¹⁷¹ So, unlike Tiberius, whose expulsion of Isis worshippers (2.85.4), if misplaced, at least showed an adherence to traditional religiosity, Nero actively embraces Egyptianizing and un-Roman practices, showing the extent to which the ruling house has lost any interest in preserving Roman religious memory. The other thing Nero believes is worth commemorating about Poppaea, their deified baby daughter, also shows a lack of concern with appropriateness when it comes to cult. Their short-lived baby’s deification exemplifies the religious inappropriateness that can arise from senatorial flattery; in using it as a reason to praise Poppaea, Nero shows he does not understand truly praiseworthy

¹⁶⁸ A common fate of the wives of tyrants and kings: see Mayer 1982, 249; Holztrattner 1995, 130; Champlin 2003, 111. Gillespie 2014, 124 suggests that Poppaea perhaps actually died of some natural cause, such as a miscarriage.

¹⁶⁹ *Iracundia* signifies a specific instance of the general characteristic *ira* (cf. Gerber and Greef 1903 s.v. *iracundia*). This differs from the view of Cicero (*Tusc.* 4.27) and Seneca (*Dial.* 3.4.1), to whom *iracundia* is the ingrained characteristic of being subject to *ira* (Hurley 2001, 217; see also Suet. *Claud.* 38.1).

¹⁷⁰ Gillespie 2014, 136. Poppaea’s body is a *cadaver conditum*, preserved by herbs, rather than a mummy prepared using a salt or mineral compound, as in Egypt; on methods of preservation, see Chioffi 1998, 23–4.

¹⁷¹ The discovery of Isiac material in a house at Pompeii belonging to Poppaea’s cousin may suggest that she was part of an Egyptophile family; Suetonius (*Otho* 12.1) notes that Otho, her first husband, participated in Isiac rites (Malaise 1972, 403–5; Chioffi 1998, 31, 35–6).

behavior, which she never did display.¹⁷² And Tacitus describes both her beauty and the baby she bore as the gifts of *fortuna*; given that her death at the hands of her tyrannical husband was also described as fortuitous, this takes on a sinister cast. *Fortuna* may have given Poppaea what her moral conduct deserved, but since Nero was actually the agent of that deadly reward, it is shameless for him to mention fortune's gifts.

The *fortuna* or *fors* that plays a trick on Nero, saves Vespasian, and kills Poppaea could be seen as part of a larger divine architecture within the *Annals*. Much as in *Ann.* 4.1.1, it is an agent of punishment, only this time it is more obvious for which transgressions that punishment is occurring: for the rash assumption of divine favor, and the careless reading of apparent messages from the gods by an emperor and a populace quick to embrace the power of positive spin. Both of these problems have a long history in the *Annals*; the Bassus episode, then, shows the supernatural as well as the very real consequences of the ignorance and manipulation that has characterized the Julio-Claudians' approach to Rome's religious traditions since the beginning of their dynasty. At the same time, Poppaea's death shows Nero's continued impious thinking and behavior, while Vespasian's preservation hints at what will come after him. This combination of references therefore becomes a tool for Tacitus to meditate on the Julio-Claudians' demise and its cause.

7.9 WRATH OF THE GODS

The first chapters of *Annals* 16 emphasize *fortuna* or chance as a causative force in affairs, but what follows suggests that it is connected with other supernatural layers of causation, much as in the opening of *Annals* 4. Tacitus closes his account of AD 65, the year of Bassus' dream and Poppaea's death, with another prodigy list, indicating the gods' displeasure:

Tot facinoribus foedum annum etiam dii tempestatibus et morbis insignivere. vastata Campania turbine ventorum, qui villas arbusta fruges passim disiecit pertulitque violentiam ad vicina urbi; in qua omne mortalium genus vis pestilentiae depopulabatur, nulla caeli intemperie, quae occur<re>ret oculis. sed domus corporibus exanimis, itinera funeribus complebantur; non sexus, non aetas periculo vacua; servitia perinde et ingenua plebes raptim exstingui, inter coniugum et liberorum lamenta, qui dum adsident, dum deflent, saepe eodem rogo cremabantur. equitum senatorumque interitus, quamvis promisci, minus flebiles erant, tamquam communi mortalitate saevitiam principis praevenirent.

(*Ann.* 16.13.1–2)

¹⁷² Cf. *Ann.* 13.45.2 *huic mulieri cuncta alia fuere praeter honestum animum*, "The woman had everything besides an honorable spirit." See also Plass 1988, 63.

(With storms and diseases, the gods also marked out a year made foul by so many crimes. Campania was devastated by a whirlwind, which indiscriminately destroyed villas, trees, and crops, and carried its violence up to the parts near the city, where a strong pestilence was laying waste to every type of mortals, although there was no immoderateness of the climate which was visible to the eye. But the houses were filled with dead bodies, and the roads with funeral processions; no sex or age was free from danger, and slaves and freeborn *plebs* alike were quickly extinguished amidst the laments of their wives and children, who were often cremated on the same pyre while they sat by and wept. The deaths of equestrians and senators, although indiscriminate, were less lamentable in that thanks to widespread death they forestalled the princeps' savagery.)

While these are certainly not the first prodigies to involve bad weather (compare, for example, Britannicus' funeral, 13.17.1), Tacitus here draws a sustained comparison between the destructive actions of god-sent wind and pestilence and the equally destructive crimes of the emperor.¹⁷³ It is clear from the beginning that the gods are taking an active role in these disasters: Tacitus alters the usual Livian formula *annus insignis (esse)*, by using the unusual verb *insignire*.¹⁷⁴ Making the gods into the syntactical subject highlights their agency in delivering this warning, or punishment, to mortals. The adjective *foedus* applies equally to the whirlwind that follows and to the series of executions and suicides of Nero's rivals just described in 16.9–11.¹⁷⁵ Titius Sabinus' "sacrifice" that began AD 28 was similarly described as "a foul beginning to the year" (4.68.1 *foedum anni principium*): the similarities of language and weather suggest a continuity of Imperial transgression and divine anger that has intensified throughout the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and in the short term was motivated by Nero's own violent and extreme actions. Although there was a long history in the Roman religious tradition of interpreting epidemics as signs of divine anger,¹⁷⁶ this one is particularly appropriate as a response to Nero's crimes. The plague, like the whirlwind, is indiscriminate in the destruction it causes.¹⁷⁷ The detail that the disease makes no distinction of sex or age among its victims recalls the pitiless actions of Germanicus' troops in Germany (1.51.1 *non sexus, non aetas miserationem attulit*, "Neither sex nor age aroused pity"), and more recently a tragic family scene, where L. Vetus, accused with Nero's blessing (16.10.1–2), commits suicide along with his elderly mother-in-law and

¹⁷³ The plague seems supernatural, since it arises in an absence of severe weather conditions. For the air/sky as a source of disease, cf. Lucr. 6.1096–7; Virg. G. 3.478; Bartera 2008, 178. Cf. also the prodigy of a statue that turns around "on a day that was serene and undisturbed" (*Hist.* 1.86.1 *sereno et immoto die*). For similarities between Tacitus' plague and those of Livy, Virgil, and Lucretius, see Tromaras 1998.

¹⁷⁴ Bartera 2008, 176. Cf. *Agr.* 41.3. Livy uses the combination *annus insignis* twelve times (e.g. 30.26.5, 40.29.2).

¹⁷⁵ Bartera 2008, 175.

¹⁷⁶ See Krauss 1930, 80–7; Levene 2010, 353.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Bartera 2008, 177.

young daughter (16.11).¹⁷⁸ The disease clogs the city with funerals, a description also used of Nero's backlash against the Pisonian conspiracy (cf. 15.71.1 *compleri interim urbs funeribus*, "Meanwhile the city was filled with funeral processions"). Tacitus makes this connection between death from plague and death from Nero clear when he implies that dying of the disease, in saving *equites* from the emperor's clutches, has become a blessing in these dark times. This also recalls the incident from Claudius' reign, also interpreted as a prodigy, in which one from each rank of magistrates died suddenly (12.64.1); these deaths, like those, suggest the demise of the state's ruling class,¹⁷⁹ but now it is even clearer that it is the *princeps* who is responsible for that demise. In Nero's principate, then, such wanton destruction, problematic enough when Germanicus focused it against barbarians along the Rhine,¹⁸⁰ is seen at home, visited upon innocent families, Roman noblemen, and Nero's own relatives. Both *princeps* and plague fill Rome with death.

The gods, then, have indicated all too clearly that Nero's past and future behavior is destructive to Rome, and there is no sign of a remedy. As the leader of a populace afflicted by god-sent plague, Nero has a famous literary model in Agamemnon of the *Iliad*, in that he brings divine wrath, manifested in a plague, upon his entire society. But whereas Agamemnon grudgingly rectified his error for the benefit of his army (*Il.* 1.116–7), Nero shows no such impulse. There are also Roman models for Nero, like the plague in 463 BC described by Livy, a punishment for class-related violence, which killed a consul and several priests before being duly expiated; or a pestilence in 384 BC seen as punishment for the execution of M. Manlius Capitolinus.¹⁸¹ Yet Nero, like his Julio-Claudian predecessors, here rejects the prodigy-expiation system, a mainstay of Roman cult practice and religious memory. The storms, too, he ignores. Such destructive whirlwinds were traditionally seen as prodigies and were interpreted and expiated on the advice of haruspices or other priests; once again, the haruspices, whose traditional areas of expertise included destructive storms of this nature,¹⁸² are not consulted, making Claudius' revival of the college irrelevant as far as helping Rome correct its collision course with the gods' anger.

As prosecutions, convictions, and executions of the Roman nobility continue through the end of the extant portion of *Annals* 16, Tacitus deepens the connection between these accusations and divine anger, while also emphasizing his own role in commemorating these tragedies. Following the prodigy list,

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Bartera 2008, 180–1.

¹⁷⁹ See §6.5, p. 277.

¹⁸⁰ See §2.2, pp. 78–9.

¹⁸¹ On 463 BC, see Livy 3.7.6–8 with Levene 1993, 163–5. For 384 BC, see Livy 6.20.16–6.21.1, with Levene 1993, 206–8.

¹⁸² Livy 25.7.7, 37.3.3, 40.2.1–3, 40.45.1–6; *Obsequens* 18 (*turbinis vi*, the same formulation Tacitus uses). See Krauss 1930, 48–9; Santangelo 2013, 85–6. For the haruspices' expertise in the interpretation and expiation of storms, see MacBain 1982, 119.

AD 66 opens with another accusation based on consultations of astrologers. Antistius Sosianus, previously exiled by Nero for scurrilous poetry (*Ann.* 14.48), befriends astrologer and fellow exile Pammenes; when he discovers that people are still consulting him (16.14.1), he intercepts two letters, one in which P. Anteius asks Pammenes about his birthday and future (16.14.2 *dies genitalis eius et eventura*), and another set of correspondence in which Ostorius Scapula asks similar questions (*de ortu vitaque*), and takes the letters to Nero as evidence of a plot against him, hoping to ingratiate himself. The outcome for Anteius and Ostorius is enforced suicide (16.14.3–15.2). On the one hand, Antistius actually has a rather good case against the other two men, whose consultations are clearly suspicious: asking about one's own birthday (*dies genitalis, de ortu*) is a clear sign of attempting to determine one's own fitness to rule.¹⁸³ But Tacitus' observations following the men's suicides suggests a degree of sympathy. After begging his readership's pardon for a dull narrative of deaths not enlivened by any account of a foreign war (16.16.1), he says,

neque aliam defensionem ab iis quibus ista noscentur exegerim, quam ne oderim tam segniter pereuntis. ira illa numinum in res Romanas fuit, quam non, ut in cladibus exercituum aut captivitate urbium, semel edito transire licet. detur hoc inlustrium virorum posteritati, ut quo modo exequiis a promisca sepultura separantur, ita in traditione supremorum accipiant habeantque propriam memoriam. (16.16.2)

(Nor would I demand any other justification from those to whom these matters will become known than that I do not hate those who perished so sluggishly. Such was the divinities' wrath against Roman affairs that it may not be passed over after a single mention, as with armies' disasters or cities' captivity. May this be granted to the descendants of illustrious men: that just as by last rites they are differentiated from an indiscriminate burial, so via the handing down of their last moments may they receive and retain their own personal memory.)

Although they did not die on the battlefield for Rome in the traditional manner,¹⁸⁴ Tacitus says, he will nevertheless commemorate these victims of the informers and of the Neronian regime in general in all their numerousness and tedium. This recalls Tacitus' previous statements about his commitment to transmitting adulatory decrees of the Senate, following his report of attempts to involve inappropriate priests in the games for Livia's health (3.65.1) and in the context of the many egregious cultic honors commemorating the death of Octavia (14.64.3).¹⁸⁵ Both of these prior authorial intrusions—exceedingly rare for Tacitus—come in contexts where he chronicles abuses of Rome's ritual

¹⁸³ Bartera 2008, 188–9.

¹⁸⁴ For this interpretation of *segniter*, see Bartera 2008, 222, who provides a clear analysis of this difficult sentence.

¹⁸⁵ On the passages, see §3.5, pp. 163–4, and §7.5, pp. 309–11.

traditions to commemorate members of the Imperial family (or their deaths). Here Tacitus, while still maintaining a link between cult practice and the commemoration of mortals, does something slightly different, in asserting that the prevalence of such deaths is a manifestation of the gods' wrath. Syme considered the *ira numinum* statement "a striking and ominous phrase, but no confession of a creed,"¹⁸⁶ yet the prodigies and portents that Tacitus has just described in 16.13 reinforce the feeling that these widespread deaths, like the ones caused by storm and sickness, really do signify that the gods are angry.¹⁸⁷ The phrase *ira deum* also, like the observations about *fortuna* opening book 16, recalls the wording describing the change in Tiberius' reign in AD 23 (4.1.2 *deum ira in rem Romanam*). This time, however, several sets of prodigies have occurred, so it is (or at least should be) less of a surprise for Tacitus to mention divine anger. Also as in *Annals* 4, the stretch of Tacitus' narrative that follows will be marked by the deaths of many prominent Romans through the activities of accusers, reinforcing once again the continuity of Rome's problems over the course of several Julio-Claudian principates. In addition to commemorating abuses of the system, then, Tacitus says, he will commemorate murders that can be seen as the manifestation of the gods' wrath. His assumption for the third time of the persona of the historian who chronicles terrible developments in Roman cultic memory perhaps suggests a connection between those earlier ritual abuses and the present manifestation of divine wrath in a principate which allows or abets the condemnation of its citizens to a greater extent than ever before.

The fact that all this is prompted by accusations involving astrology is significant, too, for throughout the *Annals*, I have suggested, Tacitus describes *principes* and their families who practice astrology themselves while also condoning the *delatores'* condemnations of others for making the same sorts of consultations.¹⁸⁸ The remainder of the surviving narrative of *Annals* 16 is dominated by the deaths of Petronius, Thrasea, and Soranus, and religious offenses related to Imperial cult and astrology appear in the charges against the latter two. Thrasea is attacked for his response to the decreeing of cultic honors for Imperial women. The accusations against him are that "he had left the Senate when a motion was being made about Agrippina, as I have noted" (*Ann.* 16.21.1 *quod senatu egressus est cum de Agrippina <re>ferretur, ut memoravi*), and that "when the gods' honors were being decreed for Poppaea he happened to be absent, and had not attended the funeral" (16.21.2 *cum deum honores Poppaeae decernuntur, sponte absens, funeri non interfuerat*). The already-narrated incident to which Tacitus refers is the meeting of the

¹⁸⁶ Syme 1958, 521, accepted by Bartera 2008, 223–4.

¹⁸⁷ See e.g. Davies 2004, 201.

¹⁸⁸ See §6.4, p. 279 (Agrippina); §1.5, p. 52 (Tiberius). Such religious attacks were a standard tactic of the *delatores*: see Rudich 1993, 25.

Senate shortly after Agrippina's death, in which Thrasea responds to the decrees embedding Nero's murder of his mother into Rome's ritual calendar by simply walking out: "Thraseda Paetus, accustomed to letting prior flatteries pass in silence or with a brief assent, on that occasion left the Senate and made for himself a reason for danger but did not furnish the others with a beginning of freedom" (14.12.1 *Thraseda Paetus silentio vel brevi adsensu priores adulationes transmittere solitus exiit tum senatu ac sibi causam periculi fecit, ceteris libertatis initium non praebuit*). While Tacitus is not impressed by the futility of Thraseda's gesture for restoring senatorial *libertas*, he implies that Thraseda is right to want nothing to do with the decrees for Agrippina: in the next sentence after Thraseda's departure, Tacitus describes a series of prodigies (14.12.2), suggesting that the proposals commemorating Agrippina's demise were distasteful to the gods as well.¹⁸⁹ Thraseda's apparent disdain for cultic honors aggrandizing the Imperial family already has drawn Nero's ire: Tacitus also notes that Thraseda was prohibited from attending the birth of Nero's baby daughter, commemorated with cultic honors, and that this exclusion was interpreted as a mark of Imperial disfavor that foretold his death (15.23.4).¹⁹⁰ So the reader has already been prepared for the idea that Thraseda's distaste for the cultic honors surrounding Neronian Imperial women is legitimate, but will ultimately lead to his destruction.

The charges made against him now by the accuser Cossutianus Capito, however, are rather different. Among other accusations, including a three-year absence from the Senate house, are allegations about Thraseda's participation in cults new and old:¹⁹¹

Quin et illa obiectabat, principio anni vitare Thrasedam sollemne ius iurandum; nuncupationibus votorum non adesse, quamvis quindecimvirali sacerdotio praeditum; numquam pro salute principis aut caelesti voce immolavisse... "eiusdem animi est Poppaeam divam non credere, cuius in acta divi Augusti et divi Iuli non iurare. spernit religiones, abrogat leges." (*Ann.* 16.22.1, 3)

(Indeed, he also made these accusations against him: that at the beginning of the year Thraseda had avoided the solemn oath-taking, that he had not been present at the pronouncements of vows, although he was endowed with the quindecimviral priesthood; he had never sacrificed on behalf of the *princeps*' safety or his celestial voice... "Not believing that Poppaea is divine and not swearing to the acts of divine Augustus and divine Julius are characteristic of the same mindset. He spurns religious scruples, repudiates the laws.")

¹⁸⁹ See Davies 2004, 199. On the passage, see §7.3, pp. 301–2.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Koestermann 1968, 379.

¹⁹¹ Some of the observations in this section were previously delivered in talks at Corpus Christi College, Oxford and the Universität Erfurt in June 2013; I am grateful to these audiences for their observations.

Is this really a case of emperor-cult thought-crime? It is not necessarily clear whether what Cossutianus is criticizing is Thrasea's *beliefs*: cultic *actions*, and Thrasea's absence from them, are a large part of what is at issue. The vows for the health of the emperor at the beginning of every calendar year were by this time a regular feature of Roman religious life.¹⁹² Thrasea's absence is all the more shocking because he was a quindecimvir; for Thrasea to simply desert this important religious post is a stark contrast with Tacitus' own apparent attitude to the office, since he kept fulfilling its duties under the terrible emperor Domitian with no apparent distaste (11.11.1).¹⁹³ But within one sentence, the charges shift from the reasonable to the less reasonable: although the vows for the emperor's safety are by now perfectly routine, sacrificing for Nero's *caelestis vox* recalls the praise of Nero's "Augustiani" (14.15.5) and sounds more like flattery of a performance-loving megalomaniac than a meaningful religious act; now quindecimvirs are apparently expected not only to pray to the gods for the safety of the emperor, but also to flatter Nero in the same Apolline terms as the hired applauders.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, the accusations about Poppaea show an elision between things that by now were an uncontroversial part of the state cult and things that are more extreme or problematic. The *sollemne ius iurandum* at the beginning of the year is the oath, repeated every 1 January, to uphold the *acta* of previous *principes*, and had already been a feature of the Roman calendar for some time. The oath is also closely related to emperor cult, since it is particularly the *acta* of the *divi* that Tacitus highlights, as evident from Cossutianus' complaint that Thrasea, in addition to failing to "believe in" Poppaea, failed to uphold the *acta* of *divi* Julius and Augustus. In Tacitus' wording, as Koestermann notes, "in both cases the weight of the expression lies on *divus*, just as it does with Poppaea."¹⁹⁵ Whatever is being said about Thrasea's "disbelief" in Poppaea, it is closely linked with his failure to show the proper respect to other *divi*. Yet are Poppaea and her deified baby daughter really of the same caliber as *divus Augustus* and *divus Julius*? In the extant portions of the *Annals*, we have received the impression that not everyone in the Imperial house is considered equally worthy of deification; Tiberius, for example, emphasized the distance between himself and *divus Augustus*, and demurred on deifying Livia.¹⁹⁶ The first Imperial woman to be deified was Caligula's sister (and, allegedly, lover)

¹⁹² On the vows see Weinstock 1971, 217–9; Price 1984, 214–5; Beard et al. 1998, i.252; Rüpke 2007, 163. Cf. Gradel 2002, 370–1 on the sacrifices of the Arval Brethren.

¹⁹³ See §0.2, pp. 14–15, and §6.2, pp. 244–5. For Thrasea's quindecimvirate, see Rüpke 2008, 625.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Koestermann 1968, 380, comparing *Ann.* 14.15.5.

¹⁹⁵ Koestermann 1968, 382: "Das Gewicht der Aussage liegt beidemale auf *divus*, ebenso wie bei Poppaea."

¹⁹⁶ *Ann.* 4.37.3, with Gradel 2002, 287, and §4.4, pp. 189–90; 5.2.1, with §5.2, p. 212. Other sources also suggest that not even every emperor was considered worthy of deification: see Sen. *Apocol.* 11.3 (on Claudius) and *Clem.* 1.10.3 (on Augustus).

Drusilla (Suet. *Calig.* 24), not exactly a ringing endorsement of the practice, and Livia had to wait twelve years after her death to be deified by Claudius. It is unfortunate that we do not have Tacitus' account of either of these incidents, but on the whole it appears that there was a general feeling in the early empire that Imperial wives and children did not necessarily deserve deification to the same extent that actual emperors did.¹⁹⁷

Thrasea's attitude to Poppaea, then, is directly linked by his accuser with a failure to show due reverence to the memory of earlier *divi* and to perform the rites on behalf of the living emperor that his position in the hierarchy of the Roman state cult demanded of him. But it is also related to his unwillingness to participate in acts of cultic commemoration of the Imperial house that Tacitus has suggested seem motivated solely by flattery. So it is not simply Thrasea's mental conceptions of Poppaea that Cossutianus is criticizing, but rather, his failure to show due reverence to the Imperial family in general by performing the proper ritual and cultic actions. It is one thing to show reverence for past *divi* and to ask for divine favor for their living relatives within the mechanisms of the state cult; but it is quite another to worship a wife and baby whose cults were instituted out of a particularly egregious form of flattery. It is one thing to "believe" cognitively that Poppaea is a goddess, and quite another to manifest that belief in the performance of cult activities. These two distinctions are important for what they show about the rhetoric of Imperial cult at this point in the principate. Cossutianus' accusations elide the difference between "real" *divi* and less deserving recipients of cultic commemoration that previous emperors have sought to maintain. With Nero, those distinctions have eroded; prayers for the emperor's "celestial voice" have become as expected as prayers for his safety, cultic commemoration of Poppaea as de rigueur as respect for the "real" *divi* Julius and Augustus. (Notably, *divus* Claudius is not mentioned; apparently he is so unworthy of divinity that he is entirely irrelevant to Cossutianus' argument.) But we also see Cossutianus eliding the distinction between what one person is prepared to acknowledge and what the regime insists everyone accept. To be sure, as I have demonstrated, a large part of what Cossutianus criticizes is Thrasea's ritual inaction rather than his cognitive conception of the new Poppaea; but there is also a very real sense that Thrasea's mental understanding of Poppaea's divinity, or lack thereof, is also being criticized. *Credere* implies not ritual practice but cognitive activity, while Cossutianus' attribution of Thrasea's disbelief in Poppaea to his *animus* echoes philosophical discussions of belief, which was said to reside in the ψυχή/*animus*.¹⁹⁸ In other words, both

¹⁹⁷ Gradel 2002, 346, 348. It would later become common, however, for emperors to deify their wives; see Beard and Henderson 1998, 200.

¹⁹⁸ Morgan 2015, 447–9, 455.

attitudes to Poppaea's divinity and the performance of cult acts to earlier *divi* are described, and criticized, as cognitive processes that are somehow deviant.

This is the first time in the *Annals* that someone's personal conception of the divinity of a member of the Imperial house is questioned and censured, and the fact that Cossutianus Capito is able to get away with it shows how low Nero's court has sunk. Overall, Tacitus' portrayal of the worship of *divi* in the *Annals* has not suggested that it is per se problematic; rather, it is particular instantiations of cultic commemoration that are suspect, especially those directed at living members of the Imperial family and those arising out of flattery. So while Cossutianus erases the distinction between believing in Poppaea and performing cult actions to other *divi*, he is not necessarily correct to do so. Tacitus has shown, through juxtaposing instances of cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family with prodigies demonstrating divine anger, that there is a problem with the kinds of things Thrasea has ostentatiously avoided taking part in. Thus Thrasea's friends' advice that he should try to defend himself in the Senate and move Nero by his pleas seems exceptionally naive: in exaggerated language they call upon Thrasea to use "superhuman words, as if coming from some divinity; by that miracle even Nero could be moved" (*Ann.* 16.25.2 *voces quasi ex aliquo numine supra humanas: posse ipso miraculo etiam Neronem permoveri*). These words are an ironic mirroring of the "divine voice" of Nero for which Thrasea refused to pray.¹⁹⁹ Yet Thrasea should not *have* to speak with divine voice, because Nero should never have allowed his voice to be worshipped and should have heeded the voice of the real gods expressed in prodigies throughout his principate. It is absurd to think that Nero will be moved by the *miraculum* of human (or even superhuman) speech when he has been impervious to a long series of supernatural events. So while Thrasea the delinquent decimvir is an imperfect hero, the twisted logic of Cossutianus is far worse, and shows an increased lack of tolerance for those who do not subscribe, or do not subscribe with sufficient enthusiasm, to the notion that all members of the Imperial family deserve cultic commemoration. Remembering Poppaea as a goddess rather than the monster that (according to Tacitus) she was (cf. 16.7.1) is now demanded of Roman cult personnel. We have come a long way from the world of *Ann.* 1.73, when Tiberius refused to allow *divus Augustus* to be a source of destruction for citizens, and indeed from the world of 4.37.3, when he drew a firm, if problematic, line between the way he and Augustus should be commemorated. The *maiestas* disease which arose under Tiberius has exploded into a pandemic.

¹⁹⁹ I am grateful to A. J. Woodman for this observation.

In the final episode of the extant *Annals*, which focuses on the deaths of Barea Soranus and his family, astrology is again at issue. Soranus' accusers, among other charges, include the fact that his daughter consulted *magi*:

Recens et quo discrimini patris filiam conectebat, quod pecuniam magis dilargita esset. acciderat sane pietate Serviliae (id enim nomen puellae fuit), quae caritate erga parentem, simul imprudentia aetatis, non tamen aliud consultaverat quam de incolumitate domus, et an placabilis Nero, an cognitio senatus nihil atrox adferret. (*Ann.* 16.30.2)

(A recent charge, and one that connected the daughter to the father's danger, was that she had given money to magicians. It had happened really thanks to the piety of Servilia (for that was the girl's name), who out of love for her father and also because of the imprudence of youth had nevertheless asked about nothing beyond the safety of her house, whether Nero could be placated, and whether the Senate's investigation would bring nothing horrible.)

Genuine filial *pietas* characterizes Servilia and Soranus's relationship, a contrast both with Augustus' alleged *pietas* toward Julius Caesar (1.9.3 and 1.10.1), variously interpreted as genuine or as a pretext for amassing power, and with Nero's false *pietas* toward his mother (13.5.2, 14.13.3).²⁰⁰ Tacitus' assessment of her use of astrology seems to be that Servilia's consultation was well intentioned but not politically shrewd. Her father also confirms that "she, guilty only of too much piety, should be kept separate from his case" (16.32.1 *nimiae tantum pietatis ream separarent*). But her consultation also turns out to have an effect opposite to what she intended: we are not told the response of the *magus*, but to her question about "whether Nero could be placated," the answer was evidently a resounding "no," as Tacitus' subsequent narrative makes clear. Servilia denies all charges of witchcraft²⁰¹ and uses language that evidently is calculated to appeal to Nero's sense of divinity:

altaria et aram complexa "nullos" inquit "impios deos, nullas devotiones, nec aliud infelicibus precibus invocavi, quam ut hunc optimum patrem tu, Caesar, vos, patres, servaretis incolumem... nulla mihi principis mentio nisi inter numina fuit." (16.31.1-2)

(Embracing the altar-fitting and the altar she said, "I called upon no impious gods, invoked no curses, nor in my luckless prayers did I ask anything other than that you, Caesar, and you, fathers, should preserve unharmed this best of fathers... I never made any mention of the *princeps* except among the divinities.")

²⁰⁰ Rudich 1993, 161 suggests that Nero's anger at this true *pietas* contributed to the harshness of the victims' fates.

²⁰¹ For the connection between astrology and magic in the Roman mind, see Barton 1994a, 192-4.

Going to an altar is a familiar gesture of supplication,²⁰² but, significantly, we are not told at whose altar Servilia supplicates. Apparently the action is still taking place within the temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Julius (16.27.1),²⁰³ but Tacitus omits the name of the goddess. Indeed, it is not really the goddess's protection that Servilia invokes, but rather, that of the Senate and the emperor himself. On the one hand, it is rare for gods to respond directly to suppliants at their altars; usually it is human beings who do so on the gods' behalf.²⁰⁴ But in this instance, the combination of divinity's altar and emperor's goodwill brings out deeper problems. Choosing to supplicate at an altar emphasizes the religious correctness Servilia insists she has displayed: she has not called upon *impīi dei*, presumably the foreign gods of the astrologers, nor has she performed a magical binding spell (*devotio*).²⁰⁵ Part of what she grasps is the *altaria*, a word designating either a receptacle fitted to the altar for receiving offerings or the offerings themselves;²⁰⁶ to demonstrate her religiosity, Servilia lays her hand on the part of the altar most directly connected with cult activity, as if invoking the memory of all offerings made on that spot to demonstrate her own commitment to traditional religious practice. In her speech, however, she claims to have included Nero among the divinities to whom she has prayed, although, as we have seen, Nero is *not* a member of the state pantheon. Arguments based on Servilia's adherence to traditional religious practice are completely lost on an irreligious emperor like Nero, but even her obsequious assertion that she invoked the emperor's *numen* proves insufficient to save her from the fate of enforced suicide (16.33.2). The problem is twofold: not only do apparently the most religiously correct individuals in Neronian Rome still slide into cultic flattery to save their own lives (by recounting prayers to the emperor even as they supplicate at the altar of an ancient goddess), but even those obsequious pleas cannot change the mind of an emperor and Senate intent on seeing malice in every astrological consultation.

Soranus' condemnation also affects his friend Cassius Asclepiodotus, whom Tacitus praises for refusing to denounce Soranus in his hour of adversity. Asclepiodotus suffered loss of property and exile for his pains, "thanks to the gods' indifference toward both good and bad examples" (*Ann.* 16.33.1 *aequitate deum erga bona malaque documenta*). Syme reads this as a cynical statement of divine indifference to human affairs.²⁰⁷ But this passage, like the similar *Hist.* 1.3.2 and *Ann.* 14.12.2, need not mean that Tacitus does not believe in the gods, or that the prodigies they have sent have not been real.²⁰⁸

²⁰² Naiden 2006, 36–41.

²⁰³ Koestermann 1968, 401; if this scene is taking place instead in the Curia, the altar would be that of Victory.

²⁰⁴ Naiden 2006, 30.

²⁰⁵ Graf 1997, 198.

²⁰⁶ OLD s.v. *altaria* 1, 2.

²⁰⁷ Syme 1958, 521.

²⁰⁸ Pace Koestermann 1968, 404. See §0.2, pp. 16–17.

Aequitas deum here perhaps implies that the gods do not care about the fate of individuals when prodigies have been ignored and the emperor and all Rome have consistently displayed ineptitude in the religious sphere. As Davies notes, “A corporate sense of responsibility (rather than cynicism) is behind the polemical assertion . . . In a corrupt Rome, it rained on the just and the unjust alike.”²⁰⁹ These executions are the logical conclusion of the disease of *maiestas* with which the Julio-Claudian regime began. While Tiberius was (at least initially) able to distinguish between what was a permissible “insult” to *divus Augustus* and what was not,²¹⁰ Neronian Rome is capable of no such fine distinctions; the Serviliae and Asclepiodoti of the world are swept away alongside the Thraseae, if indeed even Thrasea deserved his fate.

The last remaining chapter of the *Annals*, however, prepares us for the possibility of a different, if still dark, future. Thrasea sprinkles some of his own blood, describing it as his dying sacrifice to Jupiter Liberator (*Ann.* 16.35.1); this recalls Seneca’s similar libation to the same god (15.64.4). Jupiter Liberator also recalls Jupiter Vindex, to whom the Pisonian murder weapon was dedicated by a joyous Nero (15.74.2). As the *Annals* peter out, the reader with the benefit of hindsight senses a dark cloud of impending doom over Nero’s head; might Jupiter answer these prayers by liberating Rome from Nero’s tyranny? Thrasea’s dying exhortation to his son is also a dark warning: “Watch, young man, and may the gods avert the omen; but you have been born in the sort of times when it is expedient to fortify your soul with constant examples” (16.35.1 *“specta, iuvenis; et omen quidem dii prohibeant, ceterum in ea tempora natus es quibus firmare animum expediat constantibus exemplis”*). The dying man’s exhortation to a surviving family member to prepare himself psychologically for what is to come recalls Germanicus’ final words to Agrippina (compare *firmare animum* with 2.72.1 *summittere animum*). But whereas Germanicus’ speech showed insincerity and his characteristic lack of concern for the supernatural,²¹¹ Thrasea’s sacrifice is an overt act of cultic memory. He wishes his son to watch his libation and remember it as an example of fortitude in the face of persecution by Nero, a fate which his son may share if the demise of Soranus’ daughter is any indication. Thrasea’s libation, however, is more sinister than Seneca’s, in that it is made with his own blood rather than bathwater, therefore effectively constituting a human sacrifice performed by a quindecimvir. So warped has Neronian Rome become that the ritual act of a state priest which he most hopes will endure is not a traditional rite (like Tacitus’ quindecimviral celebration of the Secular Games, 11.11.1), but a gruesome libation of his own lifeblood.

²⁰⁹ Davies 2004, 160.

²¹⁰ See §1.3, pp. 41–3.

²¹¹ On the passage, see §2.6, pp. 114–15.

7.10 CONCLUSIONS

If the connection between cultic traditions and a functioning Roman society was only hinted at in Tacitus' account of Tiberius' principate, it has become all too apparent by the time he arrives at the Neronian years. Nero is certainly the most extreme of Tacitus' (extant) Julio-Claudians, but the problems of his reign are by no means new. In Nero's misapplication of triumphal rituals, we see echoes of the way they were twisted in Germanicus' case; in the commemoration of Octavia's death and Poppaea's divinity, the logical conclusion of honors directed at Livia; in Nero's misapplication of Greek cults, a reminiscence of Tiberius and the Tiberian Senate's incompetence in dealing with them; in Anicius' proposal of a temple for Nero as a god, a replaying of Tiberius' refusal of a temple in Spain. There are also thematic echoes of Claudius' reign in the prodigies that continue to appear, and continued to be ignored, under Nero. Yet on the whole, what happened under Claudius seems to have made less of a difference to the world his successor inherits. This may, of course, be due to the fact that some of the Claudian material is missing. But the relative absence of Claudian echoes in the Neronian books is perhaps also the best evidence for Claudius' cultic ineptitude: despite his attempts to revive religious traditions and put Rome back on a proper footing with the gods in several areas, Claudius' spirit of antiquarianism and revival does not have an effect beyond his own reign, as Nero's impieties show. That could be due to Claudius' incompetence, but it also perhaps suggests that Rome was already on a collision course with the gods' displeasure, and that Claudius' attempts to bring Rome back in line with traditional practices and outlooks would not be enough to rectify the problem.

On the one hand, it is the failings of Nero and his predecessors that have allowed these problems to continue and grow. It seems that Tiberius in particular could have done more to prevent them. If he had been clearer about who in the Imperial family is worthy of veneration, perhaps the Senate would have been less likely to deify Poppaea and her baby daughter, and to allow Thræsea to suffer for his distaste for her cult. If Claudius had set a better example for his subjects than blithely talking of *benignitas deum* after signs of divine wrath, perhaps people would not have so thoroughly ignored the manifold prodigies of Nero's reign (including those strongly suggesting the gods are displeased by the expansion of the circle of people to whom cultic commemoration is applied). Yet Tacitus also makes clear that it is not just the *principes* who are culpable, but also their subjects—as has always been the case. Even those who recognize the religious problem of Nero's murders fail to protest them; even Agrippina, who has advance warning of the extent of her son's impieties, willfully ignores them; and even the Pisonian conspirators are portrayed not as a pious and viable resistance to a bad regime, but as a group

of challengers just as ignorant and disingenuous in their approach to cultic matters as Nero himself. This should not surprise us, for it has been the case from the beginning of the *Annals* that neither the emperor nor his subjects are appropriate guardians of Rome's religious traditions; indeed, the relationship between cult, emperor, and subject was already a broken system when Tiberius inherited it. In Nero, that broken system has finally unraveled completely.

Conclusions

From the deification of Augustus to Thrasea's dying sacrifice to Jupiter Liberator, alterations to Roman cultic memory pervade the extant text of Tacitus' *Annals*. The religious material that Tacitus includes—here defined as anything that enlarges the relevant environment beyond the unquestionably plausible human one¹—is dizzyingly diverse, encompassing state, foreign, and Imperial cult, temples, priesthoods, sacrifice, calendars and festivals, fate, *fortuna*, omens, prodigies, and more. But when this is examined through the lens of cultural memory theory, by considering how Tacitus' characters behavior conforms to or deviates from Rome's traditional religious practices, an important picture comes into focus. Through his carefully considered deployment of religious material, Tacitus makes painfully clear the yawning chasm separating Julio-Claudian Rome from its cultic past, and leaves little hope for improvement.

What Tacitus makes of this material is different in the different parts of the *Annals*; the decline of cultic memory becomes an important structuring device that invites the reader to reflect on changes over time within the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The Tiberian hexad, particularly complex in the amount and diversity of its religious material, is crucial in establishing the trajectory that will eventually end with Nero. Even where changes in cultic matters may seem inconsequential (Tiberius' nontraditional, non-supernatural interpretation of the Tiber flood), or where Tiberius resists them (the use of Augustus' divinity as a basis for *maiestas* trials), they have established a precedent that will be used to justify far more serious abandonments of cultic memory later in the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The worshipful treatment of Tiberius that grows directly out of the deification of Augustus is perhaps the most significant example of this: if Augustus had not become a god,² Tacitus seems to suggest, flattery of the emperor perhaps would never have deteriorated to the extent that it did. We also see from early on that the nature of the relationship

¹ See §0.1, p. 6.

² Augustus is the defining figure of Imperial cult in the *Annals*; Julius Caesar's deification was certainly instrumental in real-life cultural shifts, but Tacitus does not explore it.

between the emperor and the rest of Roman society established by the principate is a primary driver of this decline in cultic memory. It is because Tiberius is *princeps* that he is given such a say over traditional ritual, and that his actions and reactions are so important as a guide for how others (especially the Senate) behave. This suggests that it is not necessarily Tiberius personally who is entirely to blame (although he certainly does not help matters), but rather, the entire Imperial system that is responsible for the decline.

Germanicus, unfortunately, turns out to be little better than his uncle: he is, if anything, more self-aggrandizing in his use of emperor cult, less interested in Rome's cultic past, and more irresponsible in his use of religious rhetoric than Tiberius is. Far less old-fashioned than he has been thought, Germanicus turns out not to be capable of saving Tiberian Rome from itself, either cultically or otherwise. His conflicts with Tiberius also provide further evidence that the *princeps*, in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, has the last word on cultic matters regardless of whether he is correct according to traditional precedents. Even if someone else had the religious acumen that Germanicus lacks, the power structures of the principate would still make it nearly impossible to challenge Tiberius and argue for a more traditional approach to cult. After Germanicus' death, Tiberius and an adulatory Senate take the lead in shaping cultic commemoration of his demise; sincerity and traditional piety both seem to have vanished.

As Tacitus pivots in the latter half of *Annals* 3 to focusing on traditional senatorial material, things still cannot improve. The Senate's attempts to deal with questions like the ritual prohibitions of the *flamen Dialis* or Greek sanctuaries' asylum rights remain overshadowed by cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family. These episodes also show a bigger problem: reverence for antiquity and its precedents is no longer the driving principle for the Senate's cultic decision-making. This abandonment of the central principle of cultic memory represents a paradigm shift in cultural values. All of these negative developments of the Tiberian hexad are made worse by the rise of Sejanus, agent of the gods' wrath. Meanwhile, as the Spanish proposal of a temple for Tiberius makes clear, cultic commemoration has apparently become requisite as a way to honor even living emperors; when Tiberius is criticized for refusing the temple, it becomes clear just how deeply this idea has penetrated. As Tiberius comes to the end of his life, Tacitus makes ever clearer the potential future consequences of all this: Tiberius, obsessed with astrology, leaves the selection of his successor to fate (*Ann.* 6.46.3). With this statement, Tacitus raises the possibility of viewing Caligula's principate, like the rise of Sejanus, as a manifestation of the gods' wrath, a divine punishment visited upon the Romans for their inattention to religious matters.

When the text of the *Annals* resumes, Claudius' revivalism in the area of cult seems hopeful, in that it shows that some correct attitudes to religious traditions persist, even at the highest levels of Roman society. But his failure to

make any real difference, for example, by prohibiting the prodigies that begin to appear during his reign, shows the extent of the problems in Roman cultic memory: no course-correction is possible. Furthermore, the scope of Claudius' effectiveness in buttressing a collapsing religious memory is limited: his wives and subordinates pervert ritual and ignore important cultic norms. And, much as Tiberius' obsession with fate failed to prevent Caligula from becoming *princeps*, Claudius fails to stop Nero from succeeding him and ushering in an era of extreme, brazen impieties. Nero's matricide, sacrilege, and the increasingly serious prodigies that appear during his reign are the most powerful proof of the failure of Claudius' brand of religious reform, and of the Julio-Claudian dynasty's irreligiosity.

Scholars have doubted that Tacitus' references to religious matters constitute "confession of a creed,"³ or even (to use less dramatic terminology) a consistent framework for thinking about the divine and its place in human affairs. Yet, while the cultic and supernatural material Tacitus includes is extremely diverse, and its significance not always clearly explained, this analysis has shown that it has a much clearer and more teleological pattern than has been acknowledged. Reading Tacitus' religious material through the lens of religious memory brings his narrative pattern into sharp focus: he constructs a clear narrative of divine anger and punishment, tied to an equally clear narrative of Imperial Romans' changing attitudes to the maintenance of traditional religious norms. Understanding these interconnected concepts provides crucial insights into Tacitus' views on the principate and its deleterious effects on Roman society. It is certainly not novel or surprising to claim that Tacitus is critical of particular emperors or of the Imperial system in general; but this examination of religious material from the perspective of cultic memory deepens our understanding of Tacitus' historiographical project in several important ways.

Tacitus' religious material is an essential and consequential feature of the *Annals* in the way it ties together his (extant) narrative, arranging the principates of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero into a progression that shows clearly how cultic memory, and Rome's future potential, have been systematically undermined by the principate from its earliest beginnings. For Tacitus, the principate's subversion of Roman religious norms is a progressive disease whose final throes differ from its first symptoms mainly in degree rather than kind. The gross impieties of Nero have their roots in the slow changes in societal attitudes to cultic memory that began with the accession of Tiberius, and the gods' continual and apparently increasing wrath suggests that the consequences of these paradigm shifts will be very dire indeed. When the norms of cultic memory are abandoned, the resulting rupture of the *pax*

³ Syme 1958, 521, on *Ann.* 16.16.2.

deorum creates potentially enormous consequences for the Roman state's future health and existence, as the repeated prodigies of the Claudian and Neronian books reveal.

This narrative of human transgression and divine anger might strike a modern reader as overly simplistic, especially for an author of Tacitus' cynicism and perspicacity.⁴ But, as has been shown, what Tacitus does with the religious material he chooses to include is anything but simplistic. The subtle interweaving of various threads of the narrative (emperor cult, prodigies, changes to traditional cults, cultic commemoration of members of the Imperial family, the role of *fatum* and *fortuna*) creates a rich tapestry that illustrates with both subtlety and clarity the damage to cultic memory, and therefore to the Roman state and society, that is done by the principate. This may be difficult to see at first glance because of the way Tacitus scatters religious material throughout his narrative. Compared with an author like Livy, whose deployment of religious material follows a more recognizable pattern structured by the prodigy-expiation complex,⁵ Tacitus' *modus operandi* is less clear, and this makes his patterns harder to recognize. But a chronologically structured analysis demonstrates that Tacitus' placement of religious material is in no way accidental or meaningless. The juxtaposition of significant episodes, and the slow accretion of examples as the reader progresses through the narrative, suggest a thematic structure uniting the entire *Annals*.

In one sense, this overarching structure resembles an arc or a forward progression, in that impiety, transgression, and forgetfulness of traditional cultic norms all become worse as the *Annals* progress. In another sense, it also resembles a repeating loop or spiral, in that emperors, senators, Imperial family members, and populace often make choices similar to, but more egregious than, those of their predecessors in a previous reign. Many of the religious mistakes made by characters in the *Annals* are made again and again, with increasing intensity or outrageousness. Nero may be the worst by far of the Julio-Claudians at maintaining the continuity of cultic traditions necessary to ensure the gods' continued favor; but, as Tacitus' narrative suggests, he would probably not have failed so spectacularly if Tiberius and his subjects had not also made decisions that planted the seeds for Nero's impieties and the rest of Rome's failure to prevent them. Nero and Claudius' offenses in the realm of cult grow out of those of Tiberius.

Another consequential feature of Tacitus' narrative of the decline of cultic memory is the importance he places on detail. His account brims with particulars, such as the question of whether Germanicus incurred pollution by burying Varus' soldiers, an examination of the specific ritual prohibitions enjoined on the *flamen Dialis*, a recounting of all the minutiae of the arguments

⁴ Cf. Levene 1993, 241 for similar claims about Livy.

⁵ See §0.2.

used by Greek states in their bids for asylum rights, a list of the priesthoods that participated in games for Livia, the exact course and extent of the *pomerium*, and which gods were propitiated using which rituals after the great fire of AD 64. The presence of these details is unsurprising if we remember that Tacitus was a *quindecimvir*, a member of the state priesthood occupied with determining the correct ritual remedy to apply in each particular situation whenever it became apparent that the gods were angry with Rome. But these details are not merely the product of Tacitus' personal predilections; they are also crucial to his conception of Roman religion and its significance to Roman citizens during the principate. One of the defining characteristics of Roman religion was the preservation of religious traditions in order to maintain the divine favor that would ensure the state's future success, so observing these details is vitally important for Tacitus' characters and for the historian himself.

If what Tacitus shows is a decline of religiosity in the Julio-Claudian era, the reader might be tempted to think that simply reviving interest in these religious details, and returning to the complex ritual practices to which they are essential, would be enough to arrest the decline and stop Rome's apparent collision course with the gods. But it is not at all clear from Tacitus' portrayal in the *Annals* that this is the case. The best proof of this is Tacitus' portrayal of Claudius. Of all the *principes* in Tacitus' extant account, Claudius is the most committed to cultic memory. In particular, renewing the college of the haruspices, the experts tasked with helping Rome interpret and make appropriate response to prodigies (Rome's "early warning system" for divine anger), seems as though it should help Rome respond to and avert future manifestations of divine wrath. Yet this proves not to be the case, since prodigies actually intensify during Claudius' and Nero's principates, and the haruspices, rarely consulted and more rarely heeded, are deprived of the chance to make a positive change in Roman cultic memory.

Why is this attempt to return to the old ways not an effective solution? Is the decline of Roman cultic memory irreversible? What do we learn from the fact that Tacitus chooses to highlight the failure of exactly those remedies which he seems implicitly to advocate throughout the *Annals*? Claudius' revival of the haruspices is ultimately ineffective for the same reason that Tiberius' initial attempts to constrain emperor cult fail, and for the same reason that Nero's impieties only grow: because society as a whole has moved so far away from a functioning system of cultic memory that it cannot find its way back, and there is no one left with the inclination or expertise to correct or compensate for the failings of the *principes*. All of the individuals or groups who emerge as potential alternatives to the emperors turn out to be in some way ill-suited to reviving cultic memory; they are unable to change the political system that has put Augustus' heirs and descendants in charge of the state, and they are equally unable to repair the damage thereby done to Rome's relationship with its gods. Germanicus, who embodies many aspects of the pre-Imperial past,

fails roundly at piety. His manipulation of religious rhetoric for his own ends, his imperviousness to divine communications, and his misunderstanding of his own doom, mean that in this crucial respect he is not the old-fashioned person he may appear. Claudius has the appropriate concern for religious traditions, but his weakness as a leader means he is incapable of convincing others around him (particularly his own wives) to hold cultic matters in similar regard. Even the Pisonian conspirators who challenge Nero, and Thrasea Paetus who resists his agenda less violently, engage in abuses of ritual. There is also little hope that the Senate or people could provide an effective bulwark against Imperial errors. Because both groups take their cues from the emperor, at best they can only grumble or laugh when he does something religiously problematic; at their worst, they fall into an *adulatio* that only exacerbates and perpetuates emperor-led decline in cultic memory. The principate has changed Roman culture, Tacitus shows, to the extent that no repositories of traditional piety have been left untainted.

We seem to be left, then, with a very bleak picture of Rome's future prospects. It is difficult to know whether in Tacitus' eyes there was any chance for a reprieve in Rome's collision course with divine anger. Because we are missing Tacitus' account of the end of Nero's principate, it is difficult to judge what religious resonances Tacitus may have included. But because we do possess the beginning of the *Histories*, we have some information about how Tacitus viewed the fate of Roman religion in what came next: the accession of Galba and the beginning of the Year of the Four Emperors. Does this period continue the arc of declining cultic memory and increasing divine anger that is on display in the *Annals*, or does it usher in a different era with better prospects for change?

It is hard to know exactly how we should view the *Histories*, which chronicle the period after Nero but were written earlier, in relation to the *Annals*. The extant portions of the *Histories* in many respects have a religious character different from that of the *Annals*:⁶ omens, prodigies, and fate are referred to frequently, but there is not the same attention given to cultic details of the sort that proliferate in the *Annals*. The histories and practices of various cults are sometimes discussed in some detail, but these tend to be foreign (from Cyprus, the Levant, Egypt, and Judaea) rather than traditional Roman ones.⁷ This apparent difference of emphasis may be simply a problem of survival; we know, for instance, that Tacitus discussed in the *Histories* the calculations related to the Secular Games that were used by Domitian and other emperors (*Ann.* 11.11.1). The fact that the extant portion of the *Histories* deals with a civil war means that there is not the same scope for the kinds of religious decision-making by Senate and *princeps* that Tacitus highlights in the *Annals*.

⁶ Cf. §0.4, p. 23.

⁷ See Shannon 2014. For Tacitus' portrayal of Judaism, see recently Feldherr 2009.

Even if the manifold cultic details of traditional Roman religious practice do not feature in the *Histories*, certainly divine anger like that on display in the *Annals* is a major theme of the work: Tacitus makes it explicit in the proem to the *Histories* that the many prodigies that occurred during these years are at least proof that the gods do not care about human *securitas* (*Hist.* 1.3.2). That is a strong point of continuity that may suggest that the reader is to view the civil wars of AD 68–9 as part of the gods’ punishment of Imperial Rome for its Julio-Claudian transgressions.

Insofar as Tacitus in the extant *Annals* explicitly invites us to think about what comes after the Julio-Claudians,⁸ it is Vespasian to whom he draws our attention, in his comment that Vespasian escaped destruction by Nero thanks to “a greater fate” (*Ann.* 16.5.3 *maiore fato*). In what sense is that fate “greater”—“greater” simply for Vespasian himself, or does his fate also offer the prospect of a change for the rest of Rome? Tacitus explicitly identifies Vespasian as “the only one, out of all the *principes* who came before him, to change for the better” (*Hist.* 1.50.4 *solusque omnium ante se principum in melius mutatus est*);⁹ but would he say that Vespasian had the ability to fix Rome’s relationship with her gods? This question is of course impossible to answer with certainty, but there are some clues. If we assess the religious acumen of the different characters in the *Histories*, how does Vespasian fare?

One significant passage in the *Histories* where we do see attention to the details of Roman ritual is the description of Vespasian’s rebuilding of the Capitoline temple after its destruction in a battle with Vitellian forces (*Hist.* 4.53): Vespasian’s deputy, Lucius Vestinus, oversees a ceremony involving various state cult personnel (haruspices, Vestals, *pontifices*, and other unspecified *sacerdotes*) and many carefully described rites (processions, choruses of boys and girls, ritual cleansings with water, a *suovetaurilia*, prayers and animal offerings to the Capitoline Triad, offerings of gold and silver thrown into the new temple’s foundations). Cultic conservatism is explicitly at issue: “The haruspices he had assembled advised that...the temple be set up on the same foundations: the gods, they said, did not wish its ancient shape to be changed” (*Hist.* 4.53.1 *ab eo contracti haruspices monuere ut...templum isdem vestigiis sisteretur: nolle deos mutari veterem formam*). The only alteration to which “religious scruple assented” (*Hist.* 4.53.4 *religio adnuere*) was an increase of the height of the roof, which served to make the new temple more magnificent (cf. *Hist.* 4.53.4 *prioris templi magnificentiae*). For the Romans of Vespasian’s era, maintaining continuity with the Capitoline temple’s past is of paramount importance, as is consulting the proper religious experts (in this

⁸ Pelling 1993, 69, drawing on Syme 1958, 375, also notes that the mutinies that would have heralded the fall of the Julio-Claudians and the beginning of the Year of the Four Emperors would have likely been connected via ring composition with the mutinies in *Annals* 1.

⁹ See Pelling 1993, 69.

case the haruspices) to find out what rituals are appropriate. The temple reconstruction sequence therefore constitutes a display of ritual detail and concern for cultic memory that is all too rare in the *Annals*.

It is tempting to read this as a suggestion that Vespasian could be the answer to repairing Rome's breach with the gods. The destruction of the Capitoline temple, central to the Roman state cult, is for Tacitus a lamentable occurrence, "the most grievous and most horrific crime to befall the Republic of the Roman people since the foundation of the city" (*Hist.* 3.72.1 *id facinus post conditam urbem luctuosissimum foedissimumque rei publicae populi Romani accidit*). The account he then gives of the temple's foundation and history (*Hist.* 3.72.1–3) is similar to the Livian temple list of *Ann.* 15.41 in its highlighting of the temple's important role in cultic memory, because it preserves evidence of past piety stretching all the way back to Rome's regal period.¹⁰ In the Imperial present, it serves almost as a Republican time capsule in preserving the name of its non-Imperial dedicator: "The name of Lutatius Catulus remained among so many works of the Caesars—until Vitellius" (*Hist.* 3.72.3 *Lutatii Catuli nomen inter tanta Caesarum opera usque ad Vitellium mansit*).¹¹ Vespasian, then, in seeing to the rebuilding of the temple in a form as close to the original as possible, with great attention to ritual detail and with the full participation of Rome's religious experts, seems to be relatively successful in rebuilding Roman cultic memory after a serious rupture, making it possible for the stream of dedications whose loss Tacitus laments to begin again. Vespasian is certainly much more pious, for example, than Nero is in a similar situation after the temples destroyed by the fire of AD 64, where his attempts at revival and expiation are undercut by his commission of sacrilege.

From this episode, at any rate, Vespasian appears to be exactly the kind of hero of cultic memory that appears so sorely needed in the *Annals*: someone who knows what is traditional in the realm of cult, and who also is able to get the entire community to band together to put that theory into practice. But it does not necessarily follow from this that Tacitus believed the Flavians as a dynasty were necessarily better than the Julio-Claudians at preserving and maintaining cultic memory. For one thing, Vespasian is not personally present at the temple's rededication ceremony. Certainly his defeat of Vitellius' forces creates an atmosphere of stability that allows Roman attention to be turned to rebuilding the relationship with the gods, and his chosen deputy Vestinus is clearly au fait with the proper procedures to follow. But the absence of the emperor shows the ability of the Roman people to repair cultic memory without him; perhaps Vespasian himself is not as essential as he seems. Furthermore, for all the attention to cultic detail in Tacitus' description of

¹⁰ See Shannon 2012, 763–4.

¹¹ See Sailor 2008, 205–18.

the rebuilding of the Capitoline temple, Vespasian elsewhere has a less positive relationship with cult matters, as evidenced by his interest in astrology (*Hist.* 2.78.1) and amenability to miracles and foreign cults that are tainted by *superstitio* (*Hist.* 4.81).¹² In this regard, he is not perhaps much better than Tiberius.

Even more significantly, there is the rest of the Flavian dynasty to consider: if Tacitus considered the Julio-Claudians as an interconnected unit when it came to religious memory, the same may have been true of the Flavians. And just as the Julio-Claudians ended with an impious bang (Nero), so, perhaps, did the Flavians (Domitian). Since we do not have his account of Domitian's principate, we do not know how Tacitus portrayed him; certainly he would have had to walk a very careful line, since to portray Domitian as an impious monster along the lines of Nero¹³ might have compromised the authority of Tacitus himself, who served as *quindecimvir* under Domitian. Extant portions of the text, however, perhaps suggest that there was at least some room for criticism. Tacitus states that Domitian rode out the siege of the Capitoline temple by taking refuge in the house of the *aedituus*, a sacristan or caretaker who lived near the temple and controlled access to it,¹⁴ after escaping the melee by donning a linen robe and mixing into a crowd of worshippers (probably of Isis, as the choice of garment suggests).¹⁵ Later, Domitian commemorated his miraculous survival using cultic means:

ac potiente rerum patre, disiecto aeditui contubernio, modicum sacellum Iovi Conservatori aramque posuit casus suos in marmore expressam; mox imperium adeptus Iovi Custodi templum ingens seque in sinu dei sacravit. (*Hist.* 3.74.1)

(When his father took power over affairs, he tore down the sacristan's lodgings and constructed a medium-sized shrine of Jupiter the Savior, and a marble altar depicting his own misfortunes; later, after he acquired command, he dedicated an enormous temple of Jupiter the Guardian, with himself at the god's breast.)¹⁶

Is this a story of Domitian's resourcefulness in the face of danger and a genuinely pious expression of sincere thanks for his safety after the fact? Or is it a tale of cowardly escape followed by cultic self-aggrandizement? Certainly the image of the hated Domitian disguised in the costume of an Isis worshipper might have elicited a chuckle from a reader who, like Tacitus, was not enamored of Egyptian cults. While there is no explicit condemnation of Domitian's actions, certainly an inflated sense of self-importance is suggested by the fact that after

¹² See Shannon 2014, 281–5.

¹³ Tacitus explicitly compares Domitian and Nero at *Agr.* 45.2; see Woodman 2014, 319.

¹⁴ Graf 2002.

¹⁵ Linen garments were associated with priests and worshippers of Isis: cf. *Hdt.* 2.37 and 81, with Asheri et al. 2007, 295–6; Pliny *HN* 19.15; *Juv.* 6.533; Apuleius *Met.* 11.24; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 352c–f with Gwyn Griffiths 1970, 268–71; Spooner 1891, 348; Wellesley 1972, 175.

¹⁶ On the temple, whose remains have not been securely identified, see Richardson 1992, 218.

he becomes emperor, he upgrades the commemoration of his escape from a moderate shrine (*modicum sacellum*) and altar-reliefs depicting his adventures to an enormous temple (*templum ingens*) where he himself appears as an attribute of Jupiter's cult-statue. Domitian, then, seems in Tacitus' mind to have participated in the same kind of overinflated cultic commemoration that was so problematic for Nero.

Readers in search of an emperor or dynasty that can serve as physician to Rome's ailing system of cultic memory will probably have to abandon the Flavians and look elsewhere. Whether Tacitus thought any better of the principates of Nerva and Trajan, whose accounts he never got around to writing (*Agr.* 3.3; *Hist.* 1.1.4),¹⁷ is unknowable. His praise of the "rare blessedness of the times" (*Hist.* 1.1.4 *rara temporum felicitate*) under their rules may have been genuine, as Woodman argues: "The mere act of referring to the happy present means that Tacitus denies in advance that any permanent damage was done to the Roman constitution by the disasters which he is about to catalogue."¹⁸ It is possible that Tacitus' view of religion in the days of Nerva and Trajan may have reflected a similar sanguinity, and that he would have portrayed them as good stewards of religious memory, but this can only be speculation. Tacitus' opinions of them may have taken a darker turn.¹⁹

If we cannot say for certain whether any particular emperor or dynasty has the potential to repair Roman cultic memory, what Tacitus does make clear in the *Annals* is the role of the historian, and of works of history, in perpetuating the traditions of Roman religion. By preserving information about cult practice in all its bewildering detail, Tacitus himself could be seen as a conduit of religious memory, especially in a warped political system where deviation from tradition is the norm. It is significant that several authorial asides where Tacitus reflects explicitly on his own activities as a historian come at points where religious material is being discussed. The justification given for spending so much time describing the deaths of illustrious men is framed in religious terms: Tacitus claims that he feels compelled to memorialize them for posterity, but also states that their deaths constitute a display of divine wrath of such magnitude that it cannot be passed over quickly (*Ann.* 16.16.2). Here we see the historian himself performing the role of preserving cultic memory, which is inextricably tied to other forms of cultural memory: it is important for future Romans to know not only the stories of the men's deaths, but also the fact that the extreme bloodshed of the period occurred because the gods were angry with Rome. Tacitus similarly makes sure to draw attention to his own role in preserving the memory of the ludicrous instances of cultic flattery perpetrated by Julio-Claudian Romans. In the aftermath of Octavia's murder,

¹⁷ On the *Agricola* passage, see Woodman 2014, 91–2; on the *Histories* passage, Syme 1958, 219; Damon 2003, 81–2.

¹⁸ Woodman 1988, 167.

¹⁹ See Syme 1958, 219–21.

celebrated with “gifts decreed for the temples” (*dona ob haec templis decreta*) and “thanks given to the gods” (*grates deis actas*), the historian tells us that he “will not keep silent” (*neque tamen silebimus*) about similar senatorial proposals, “unprecedented in sycophancy or at the extreme of subservience” (*adulatione novum aut patientia postremum*), that may be made in the future (14.64.3). Along the same lines is Tacitus’ famous observation on “the particular duty of historical writing” (3.65.1 *praecipuum munus annalium*) to celebrate virtuous conduct and condemn its opposite, which comes in the context of Apronius’ religiously incorrect proposal that the *fetiales* should co-preside at the games celebrating Livia’s recovery from illness (3.64.4). It is important that Apronius is specifically named: “If T. is seen to criticise named individuals, his readers may be deterred from vice by the reflection that they themselves may be similarly branded by a future Tacitus.”²⁰

The fact that religious material prompts several of Tacitus’ rare first-person authorial asides suggests its importance for his conception of history and history-writing: cultic matters are key to his conception of the Julio-Claudian past and its important developments, and it is crucial to him that the reader notice and remember religious material. Tacitus the historian has an important role in constructing contemporary Rome’s cultural memory of the Julio-Claudian period. In particular, these passages have important implications for what Tacitus wants to tell his reader about navigating complex religious questions: the fact that Rome now has an emperor should not affect the way his subjects either treat him or worship the traditional gods. Any senator who makes a proposal using divine honors to flatter the emperor or changing any detail of traditional Roman cult practice will incur not only the gods’ wrath, but also the opprobrium of Rome’s future historians, just as Tacitus is now making sure the foul cultic sycophancy of Apronius and his ilk go down in history. This is how the historical works of Tacitus the quindecimvir can do their part for the perpetuation of Roman religious memory.

²⁰ Woodman and Martin 1996, 455. Cf. Luce 1991, 2961. Some scholars allow for positive exemplarity in other aspects of the *Annals* (e.g. Clarke 2002, 98–9).

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